

Play England: draft response to *Staying safe*

Play England welcomes the chance to respond to the *Staying Safe* consultation. Play England is the leading national play organisation in England, working under the aegis of the National Children's Bureau. We represent the views of the Children's Play Council whose members include, national and regional play organisations, local authorities and childcare partnerships. We promote more and better play opportunities for children and young people. We currently hold a play policy development and research contract with the Department for Culture Media and Sport.

Play England welcomes the recognition that is given to the importance of play, risk and to work of the Play Safety Forum. We agree with DCSF in that it is important to strike an appropriate balance between keeping children safe and allowing them to grow, explore and enjoy their childhoods.

Play England feels that the government needs to do more to address the many barriers that restrict children's play and informal recreation – and which prevents them from leaving their homes unsupervised. These restrictions include: increased traffic, parental anxiety about 'stranger danger' and concern from both children and parents about the behavior of other children they may come into contact with. This has resulted in a decline in unsupervised outdoor play for children and young people.

General

How safe do you think children are?

Research continues to show that there are both real and perceived dangers that have a marked impact on how safe our children are. These real and perceived risks limit children and young people's opportunity to explore, understand risks for themselves and to learn the skills vital for their own development.

Road traffic

Road traffic presents a real treat to children's wellbeing, not simply to their immediate safety, but to their health and emotional wellbeing through the constraining effects of road traffic on outdoor mobility, discovery and play. Children do not always feel 'safe' in their local area and view roads as dangerous.¹ Parents are anxious about traffic that their children might encounter and restrict their mobility accordingly.

Road accidents are the highest cause of accidental death in children. One hundred and forty-one children aged 0-15 were killed in road traffic accidents in 2005, while 3,331 were seriously injured.²

Stranger danger

As a society we need to do more to address parental concern over stranger danger. Media attention on stranger danger and abduction has naturally added to parental concerns about allowing their children more freedom. It can be argued that this is unjust based on actual trends. The likelihood of being abduction or killed by a stranger is very low and has not changed significantly over time. Unfortunately this

¹ Davis A and Jones L, Environmental constraints on health: listening to children's views. Health Education Journal (1996) 55: 363-4

² Department for Transport (2005), Road Casualties Great Britain. London: Department for Transport

misunderstanding of the threats posed to children has resulted in a restriction in their independent mobility.

Valentine³ notes that where parents express great fears about their children's safety in public space, many acknowledge that the risk of being abducted is low or fairly low yet 'despite this recognition most still opt to restrict their children's play because the consequences of not doing so and losing a child make the risk not worth while.'

Bullying, antisocial behavior and rundown or inaccessible play spaces

Bullying, antisocial behavior and rundown areas can be real concerns for children and young people's safety. In order for children and young people to feel safe, play space needs to be well-designed, accessible, maintained and offer some type of informal supervision - or be located in close proximity to houses in order for provision to feel safe. Children and young people value the presence of adults in public spaces.⁴

Problems with issues such as litter, dog fouling, graffiti, and vandalism are a reality in many places in Britain today. Ken Worpole highlights that in the UK, two-thirds of 9-11 year-olds are dissatisfied with the quality of outdoor play facilities where they live. For 15-16-year-olds this rose to 81 per cent, higher than any other European country.⁵

Obesity

Statistics from the annual Health Survey for England 2004⁶ show levels of obesity among children has risen over the past ten years. Around one in four 11 to 15-year olds are considered obese. Obesity prevalence for the period 1995 to 2004 increased from 14 per cent to 24 per cent for boys and from 15 per cent to 26 per cent for girls.

How good are we at giving children and young people the opportunity to explore, understand risks for themselves and to learn the skills vital for their development?

Reduction in ranging

The freedom of children and young people to roam around, to play independently and to discover the world is crucial to their development and happiness. However, a considerable amount of research over the past few decades indicates that children's opportunity to range independently has considerably diminished.⁷

A survey commissioned by Play England for Playday 2007 reveals how under threat this right is. Among those polled, 71 per cent of adults played outside in the street or

³ Public Space and the Culture of Childhood. Aldershot: Ashgate.

⁴ K Worpole (2003), No particular place to go: Children, young people and public space: Birmingham, Groundwork

⁵ K Worpole (2003), No particular place to go: Children, young people and public space: Birmingham, Groundwork

⁶ Health survey (2004) <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/hsechildobesityupdate>

⁷ Karsten, L. and Van Vliet, W. (2006) Increasing Children's Freedom of Movement: Introduction, Children Youth and Environment, Vol. 16 (1), pp69-73.

area close to their homes every day when they were children where as only 21 per cent of children do so today.⁸

Figures show that walking and cycling to school has dropped from 58 per cent in 1989-91 to 47 per cent in 2003-4.⁹ For children aged five to ten school car runs rose from 38 per cent in 1995-1997 to 43 per cent in 2005.¹⁰ Research conducted by Sustrans in 40 schools showed that 45 per cent of pupils wanted to cycle, but just three per cent were doing so. Similarly of the 35 per cent of children traveling to school by car, almost half would prefer not to.¹¹

Increased supervision

Nowadays it is not unusual for children to be accompanied everywhere by an adult and much research demonstrates an increased trend in which more and more children's activities take place in organised settings.¹²

Hocking and Thomas comment on the increased 'colonisation' of children's lives: the constant need to ensure that children are accompanied by adults. They highlight two significant consequences of this:

- Firstly, it increases the organisation of children's time, with associated programme pressures and decreases children's self-directed time - the time when children exercise their imagination, curiosity and creativity.
- Secondly, the increasing control of children's time and movements by parents leads to a 'censorship' of possible behaviours. Parents are more likely to foster, promote and organise those activities they deem to be appropriate for their children. Parental understanding of what is likely to be appropriate will reflect the social and commercial pressures that prevail at any time, particularly through educationally desirable activities and a sanction of what is deemed to be risky and unsafe.

Have we got the right balance between keeping children safe and also allowing them the freedom to develop?

Currently, we feel that the right balance between safety and allowing children the freedom to develop is not being obtained. Research demonstrates children and young people do not have the same level of freedom as previous generations.

Children need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving risk of injury.

It is the job of all those responsible for children to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop

⁸ ICM (2007) Opinion poll on behalf of Play England for Play Day 2007:

www.playday.org.uk/playday_campaigns/2007_our_streets_too/research.aspx

⁹ Sustainable development indicators in your pocket (2006) Defra and national Statistics

¹⁰ See end note 4.

¹¹ Sustrans (2005) Bike it: Project review. Sustrans

¹² Rasmussen, K. and Smidt, S. (2003) The Neighbourhood in the Children. In Christensen, P. and O'Brien, M. (Eds.) Children in the City. London: RoutledgeFalmer

their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risk. This is part of a wider adult social responsibility.

Good quality play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, good play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.¹³

In the past, concerns about children having accidents at playgrounds led to their closure. However, a growing body of evidence suggests that the number of injuries at playgrounds is lower than other popular sports, and that a sense of risk can positively encourage children's development.¹⁴ It satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about the real consequences of risk taking. If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn skills and maybe likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater.

Key to this debate about obtaining the right balance between keeping children safe and also allowing them freedom to develop is to distinguish between environment, activity and age. Children of different ages require a variety of provision to meet their need to play, develop and at the same time stay safe. This should include a mix of supervised provision - staffed by qualified play workers, outdoor spaces designed or equipped for play, welcoming and well designed public open spaces and safe residential streets. If available to all children and young people, this mix of playable space will allow them and their parents the opportunity to choose an appropriate play environment and activity in relation to the children's age and ability.

Would parents welcome a communications campaign and information on play and positive activities in there local area?

The campaign should also include teachers, health workers and institutions to highlight the importance of free play and informal recreation for children and young people in developing their resilience, physical and emotional well being and in supporting formal learning.

Parents do need help in putting their fears for their children's safety into context, as prolific media coverage over child abduction cases (still rare) does help create a culture of fear for outdoor and unsupervised play. However, parents are often aware of the benefits of outdoor play¹⁵ but have genuine concerns about the suitability of the outdoor world: traffic, bullying and rundown or inaccessible play areas. Changes in environment and play opportunities need to be accompanied by a campaign based

¹³ CPC, NCB, Sutcliff play, (2004) Managing risk in play provision: A positive statement, Play Safety Forum: Children's Play Council, National Children's Bureau, Sutcliff play

¹⁴ Health and Safety Executive (2002) Playgrounds – risk, benefits and choices
www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_hfm/2002/crr02426.htm

¹⁵ Clements R (2004) An investigation of the state of outdoor play. Contemporary issues in early childhood.

on social marketing principles, to increase parents' confidence in letting their children out to play.

Traffic and rundown inaccessible play areas remain the most significant barrier to outdoor play for both parents and children and young people¹⁶ and this has to be addressed if parents are to be successfully encouraged to allow their children more outdoor play opportunities.

What more should be done to enable children and young people to play safely and explore the outside world?

If the range of play opportunities needed are to be available to all children and young people, Play England believes that there must be a strong lead from central government, backed by resources, to ensure all children, have access to play as a universal service. However, recent government policy relating to children's play appears to be uncoordinated. For example:

- The recent review published by DCMS, *Time for Play*¹⁷, firmly places the future of play provision in the hands of local authorities and the play sector. However, research by the Children's Play Council for DCMS¹⁸ has shown clearly that this approach to provision, with little guidance or direction from central government, leads to a patchwork of provision with many children's needs not being met and parents and children in many areas feeling it is too unsafe for their children to play out.
- The Public Health White Paper, *Choosing Health*, and its subsequent Physical Activity Action Plan, *Choosing Activity*, identified barriers to outdoor play as a factor in the growing childhood obesity epidemic. Action to address the problem was limited however to a reference to a developing 'strategic approach to play policy' by DCMS. However, the recent review published by DCMS, *Time for Play*¹⁹, fails to set out such a strategic policy, placing the future of play provision in the hands of local authorities and the play sector.
- DCMS, currently, spends a mere £500,000 a year on information, research and policy development for play compared with hundreds of millions of pounds on its other interests of sport, art and culture. This appears to be the only dedicated budget line for play across government.
- *Time for Play* highlights the valuable contribution to children's play currently being made through the Big Lottery Fund's £155m Children's Play initiative. The intention is that the new services and structures being created through this initiative should form the basis of a refreshed commitment to play provision in the future. It is becoming increasingly clear however that, without direction from

¹⁶ ICM (2007) Opinion poll on behalf of Play England for Play Day 2007:

www.playday.org.uk/playday_campaigns/2007_our_streets_too/research.aspx

¹⁷ *Time for Play: encouraging greater play opportunities for children and young people*, Department for Culture Media and Sport (August 2006)

¹⁸ *Making the Case for Play: building policies and strategies for school-aged children*, Children's Play Council (2002)

¹⁹ *Time for Play: encouraging greater play opportunities for children and young people*, Department for Culture Media and Sport (August 2006)

central government, the problems outlined by CPC in 2002, of local authorities not taking the play services seriously, are still in existence.

- The Childcare Act 2006 and Ofsted Childcare Register (OCR) make no mention of provision for children's play opportunities. This is a backwards step for children and young people as the National Daycare Standards, being replaced by the OCR required all those registered to provide childcare to ensure there were good opportunities for children's indoor and outdoor play.
- Planning Policy Guidance note 3 from DCLG, referring to housing development, and DfES guidance on the new school buildings programme both pay scant regard to the need for space for play and informal recreation.

National Government

Play England greatly welcomes the move towards a shared responsibility for play policy between Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We hope that the new government relationship will seriously consider the policy areas beyond children's services, for example, planning, traffic and green spaces, that impact on the delivery of the statutory outcome for all children and young people of enjoying play and informal recreation. As shown, the other ECM outcomes are also affected by children's freedom to play, move around and enjoy their own informal leisure, recreational, cultural and social lives.

If children and young people, are to benefit from the variety of safe play opportunities needed to promote their healthy development and prevent social problems, there must be a more strategic approach to provision, led by a cohesive national policy offering coordinated guidance, standards and direction from central government. This should:

- articulate the vision for children and young people's play and informal recreation
- provide a set of values and principles to underpin a national implementation plan
- clarify the government's priorities and commitments
- describe how providing good play opportunities supports children, families and communities
- describe the role to be played by each government department and agency
- describe the contribution expected of others
- discuss the resource implications of implementing the strategy and ensure it is adequately resourced.

Such a policy would need a national implementation or action plan to support and guide local authorities, Children's Trust's, Primary Care Trusts, Regional Development Agencies, voluntary organisations, community groups and other local agencies in providing a comprehensive range of spaces and opportunities for play and informal recreation.

Leadership and coordination would be essential: government departments and agencies would need to work closely together to underpin and support

the development of local provision. This would be most effective if:

- At a senior level, government departments whose activities affect children's play opportunities recognise and understand their role and potential impact on children's play.
- Relevant government departments work together to develop a strategic approach to development, funding, support and standards for local provision of children's play opportunities within a framework of agreed values, principles and outcomes for children and young people.
- Relevant government departments and agencies routinely assess the impact of new programmes on the availability of different types of play provision for children, with a particular focus upon open access, free provision in low income areas.

Local provision

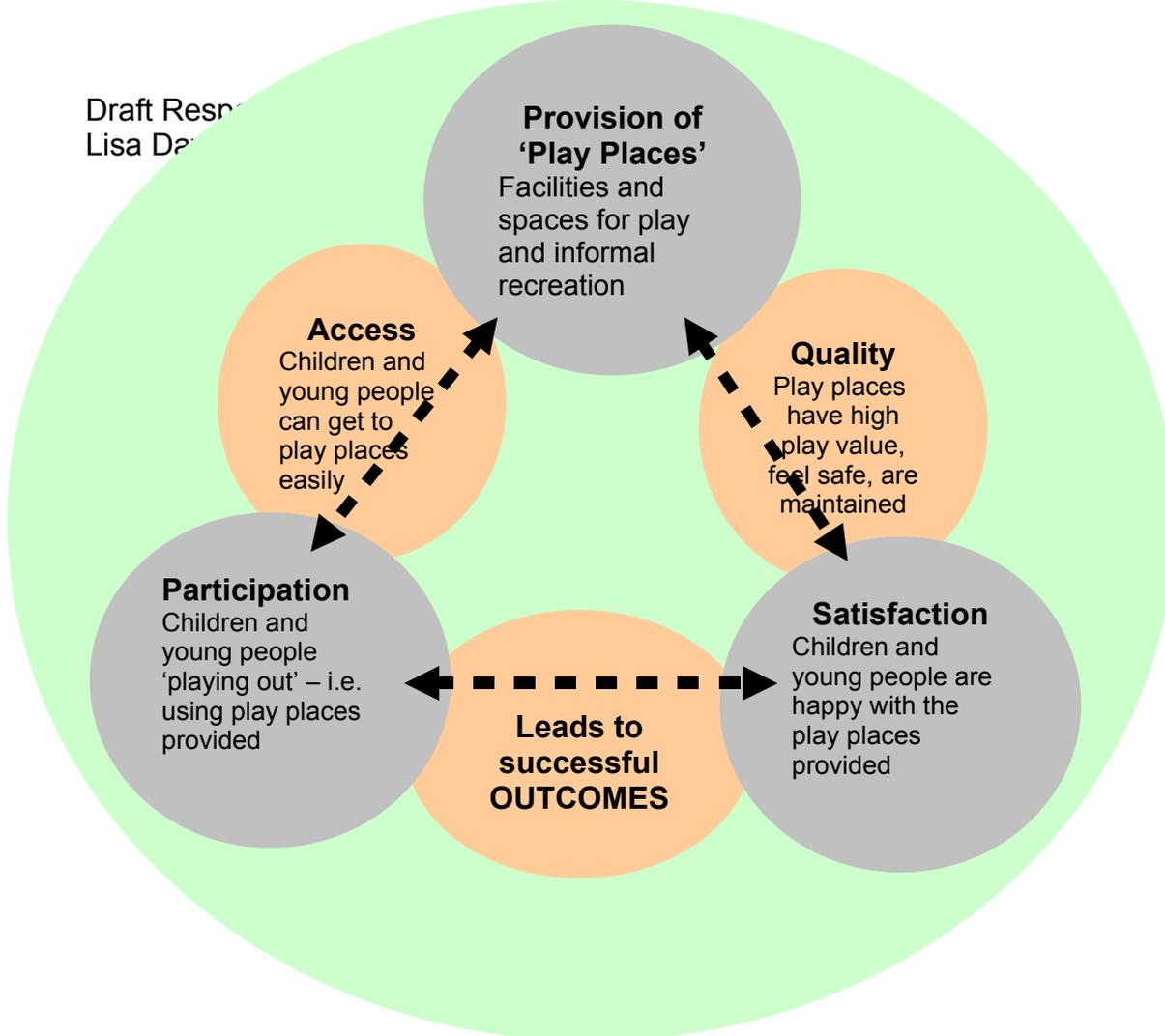
Children, by definition and convention, are not fully responsible for themselves. Adults have a duty of care to them and are responsible for the wider environments, physical, social and cultural, that they inhabit. The judgments that have to be made are about the extent to which these structures allow space and time within them for children to play, which is spontaneous, unstructured and led by the child.

Young children need to be able to play safely near their homes, in their childcare, as well as having places for their parents to take them to play. Older children and young people need space away from their homes where they can socialise and spend time with their peers. In some areas, fully staffed adventure playgrounds are open all year round, free of charge to all local children, allowing for spontaneous, unstructured, child lead play. Elsewhere, outreach play workers or play rangers ensure that children can play safely in local open spaces. In other areas mobile play provision, including play buses and mobile skate parks visit areas with little or no other provision.

Parks, street corners, playgrounds, football pitches, pavements and open spaces provide room for children to meet and play, to establish a world for themselves independent of their parents and to explore the natural and built environment. For many children, their local environment is their main experience of the outside world.

Local authorities, therefore, should be responsible for ensuring the delivery of the comprehensive play offer as part of universal services to children and young people. The key elements of the play offer are described in Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1: The 'Play Offer':



Play places

Given time, space and opportunity children and young people will play in most places. These places may or may not be specifically designed for play or informal recreation (dedicated or non-dedicated) and may or may not be supervised by staff trained in playwork or other skills.

The 'Play Place Grid' (below) gives examples of the types of facility and space which can offer children and young people the best opportunities for play and informal recreation and which should form the basis of provision where children and young people can play and meet their friends in their own neighbourhoods. All these spaces and facilities should be accessible, welcoming and engaging for all, including those who are disabled or have specific needs and wishes and, between them, should allow for the differing needs people of different ages and with different interests and abilities.

The Play Place grid

	Supervised and semi-supervised, for example	No formal supervision, for example
Dedicated places for play and informal recreation*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adventure playgrounds Open access play centres Play ranger and out- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playgrounds / play areas, Bike, skate and skateboard facilities, Ball courts, Multi Use Games Areas,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reach play projects • Mobile play facilities • School playgrounds and premises (open out of schools hours) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hangout/youth shelters
Other provision where play takes place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School playgrounds and premises during the school day • Extended school and childcare provision • Children's Centres 	
Non-dedicated places for play and informal recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks with rangers and gardeners • Streets with wardens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential streets • Neighbourhood open spaces • Parks and green spaces • Beaches, rivers and lakes • Woodlands and natural open spaces • Safe routes to school and play areas • Playing fields and recreation grounds

* Places for children and young people, where they are **free** to come and go and **free** to choose what they do whilst there and which they can use **free** of charge. (There may be some exceptions to the 'free to come and go' criteria for young children and for children who have specific needs which make independent mobility impossible for them.)

Supervised and semi-supervised play provision

For many children the security offered by the presence of trained adults is paramount in their choice of play places and can help alleviate concerns of unsupervised space. Play centres, adventure playgrounds, playschemes and other open-access provision, free to use and staffed by playworkers, can offer a wide range of indoor and outdoor play opportunities, offering children freedom and choice, excitement and challenge. Outreach playworkers, like play rangers, environmental and open-space play workers and those offering mobile play provision, are becoming increasingly popular.

Dedicated, unsupervised play provision

In most areas there are equipped playgrounds and other types of dedicated play areas, but to be successful they must feel safe. This involves being well-located, attractive, engaging, accessible and well-maintained. This type of provision is often aimed at children and young people of specific ages and interest and, in addition to playgrounds, might include skate parks, bike tracks, ball game areas, hangout shelters, fun-trails, and activity courses.

Parks and open spaces

If local parks and open spaces are well-maintained, located within communities, accessible and designed with play in mind – and children and young people are encouraged to use them – they can make the best play spaces and offer children and

young people the space to explore the outside world. Good 'natural' play spaces offer varied, interesting and challenging physical environments where children can experience nature, can have space and freedom for movement and physical exertion, and can meet and socialise with their friends.

Safer streets and neighbourhoods

The most common outdoor play place for children and young people are the streets and neighbourhoods where they live. A recent survey found that 85 per cent of adults agreed that children should be able to play safely in the street where they live²⁰. The reality is only 21 per cent of children play outside in the street or area close to their homes every day.²¹ Routes for children to get to other spaces must also be safe and easy for them to access on their own or with their friends. Local authority transport departments can have as much influence on children's play opportunities as parks, leisure and children's services departments.

Helping all children and young people to be safe

Are the areas we have identified for new action right?

In the areas that DCFS is already working, safety at school, college or in an early years setting and safety on the road, more needs to be done to support children and young people's ability to take risks and stay safe..

Safety at school, college or in an early years setting

All schools, early years and children's centres need to have a strong play element, and practitioners in these settings need to have a well-developed understanding of the value of risk and play in keeping children safe. Those working in multi-agency teams also need to understanding of the importance of play and play provision, with training and qualifications in playwork where necessary. It is also important that playwork is recognised as a key part of the children's professional workforce (common core) and that there is an expansion of playwork training, and professional parity with teachers for qualified playworkers. We propose minimum space standards, including outdoor play space in pre-school and school-age childcare which should be designed for a range of play types allowing children time to be both physically active and quiet.

Practitioners representing children and young people must ensure that there is a strong, coherent play element to the Children and Young Peoples Plan and the Sustainable Community Strategy, which in turn inform the negotiation of the children and young people's theme within the proposed new Local Area Agreement (LAA) arrangements.

In order to keep children and young people safe, opportunities for free play and informal recreation should be set within a wider approach to wellbeing. School and early years settings provide ideal spaces for children and young people to play safely.

²⁰ *Attitudes to streetscapes and street uses*, Department for Transport, (2005)

²¹ ICM (2007) Opinion poll on behalf of Play England for Play Day 2007:
www.playday.org.uk/playday_campaigns/2007_our_streets_too/research.aspx

Extended services provide an opportunity to offer safe places for children and young people to play as part of the 'core offer'. It would be a welcomed step if government explicitly stated that play should be provided as part of a 'core offer' of extended services and issue appropriate guidance to schools and the voluntary and community play sector. It would involve schools working in partnership with the voluntary and community play sector to provide year round, supervised and semi-supervised outdoor play opportunities for children and young people on school grounds and in local neighbourhoods. In addition, there needs to be a revision of the Ofsted inspection framework to ensure that play provision is inspected and meeting high quality standards. The quality of play provision within these settings could be measured against the objectives for play provision included in *Best Play*²².

The current investment in school buildings and school grounds is an opportunity to re-think the crucial role that schools play in the lives of children and communities. The Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme should include in its main objectives: the aim of ensuring that all schools have well-designed playable space which allows children to take risk and explore the world around them. The inclusion of quality outdoor play space should be set out in guidance for BSF tenders.

To offer children and young people the time for play and to relax during school day, there needs to be a national minimum duration for playtime in school. This is important to children and young people because as well as being fun, play contributes to children and young peoples cognitive learning and social and emotional wellbeing. Play and learning are not separate and providing for free play helps ensure that the school setting also attends to the social and emotional needs of children. Staff development programmes in playwork training for playground supervisors and teachers would also help in supporting children's play needs. An example is Positive PlayGrounds²³; an interactive programme for lunchtime supervisors, teachers and children at 70 primary schools in Northern Ireland, designed to enhance and support children's play. Schools, which have already benefited from this programme say it has resulted in:

- an increase in children's activity and participation levels
- a significant reduction in bullying
- improved attention-spans in class.

Safety on the roads

Accidents causing the most serious injury occur on the roads, where 52% of deaths to children by external causes occurred in 2005 – 60% of which are to child pedestrians. This is over three times more than the next highest cause of death and serious injury by external causes to children, that from assault and undetermined intent (16%). Child pedestrian deaths in England remain higher than in many other European countries.

Given the predominance of this cause of death and injury to children, it is unacceptable that the *Staying Safe* consultation allocates only one section to address this issue. Within this section, no new action is called for. The document

²² National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and PLAYLINK (2001) *Best Play, What Play Provision should do for children*. National Playing Fields Association

refers solely to the actions being delivered under the DfT's Child Road Safety Strategy (2007). Whilst road safety behaviour programmes and training are part of the solution, only one action within the strategy tackles vehicle speed - 'encouraging wider use of 20mph zones where children are active'. This is a significant missed opportunity for DCSF, who should be calling for more action than is contained within the Child Road Safety Strategy 2007.

An enforced reduction of the speed limit to 20 mph or less in all residential areas would help improve the safety of children and young people on our roads. Hull's 20 mph zones have reduced the number of people killed or seriously injured by 90%.²³

However, it is not enough to concentrate solely on road traffic accidents. In the longer term we propose that greater emphasis be placed on the role of the streetscape – design as well as traffic management – in affecting outcomes for children and young people. The opportunities for everyday activity, social development, encountering and managing risk and enjoying play and informal recreation that have traditionally been had in and around the streets where they live, are now largely denied to children until they are young teenagers. There is a need to re-shape residential streets and to rethink how they are used and perceived. We propose, a capital-funding programme for Home Zones and improvements in street design to create child-friendly neighbourhoods. This would benefit not just children, but also wider community interaction and the environment. Research has shown that Dutch children spend half their pedestrian time in traffic-calmed or controlled areas, but only 10 per cent of English children are protected in this way. Pedestrian mortality rates among English children are twice those of Dutch children.²⁴

Play and taking part in positive activities

It is not simply enough to offer parents a campaign and information on play and positive activities (please see section above).

In order to take part in play and positive activities, children and young people need access to safe places within their neighbourhoods, and the wider public realm. Children and young people need spaces to play close to their homes. To help support children and young people to play within their neighbourhood, there needs to be legislation and guidance on play space in housing developments.²⁵ This should be coupled with the introduction of play rangers in at least one park or open space in every local authority area, which would help ensure safe spaces to play away from the home.

Training and specific guidance for public realm workers, eg wardens, community officers, police etc on supporting children and young people's play needs would help children and young people's access to play space. It could work by ensuring that children and young people feel safer in the areas they live and alleviate fears that parents have about allowing their children to play out. Children and young people have said

²³ Sustrans (2006) Stay safe on the school journey: Safe routes to school: Sustrans

²⁴ Bly, Dix and Stephenson (1999) Comparative study of European child pedestrian exposure and accidents: London, Department for Transport and the Regions

²⁵ see e.g. Mayor of London's draft SPG for play space in new developments
<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/spg-children-recreation.jsp>

that they value the presence of adults in public spaces.²⁶ In addition, run down and in inaccessible play space are also barriers to children's play. To address this there needs to be a rolling investment programme to update all public play areas in all local authorities. In addition, any investment in new play facilities, parks and open spaces, needs to consider location and access. Children and young people need places near to their homes that are within the line of sight of residents. This informal supervision helps children and young people feel safer in the spaces they use.

The needs of open access play provision for children and young people have been superseded by the need to provide childcare for working parents. This, coupled with the failure of funding to reach local community organisations, has stripped away existing open-access play provision and replaced it with 'pay-to-play' daycare. This leaves many children already at risk of social with nowhere to go. These children need places where they can play free of charge, in and out of doors, in safe supervised environments. Due to the informal nature of the provision, with its looser structures and more flexible boundaries playworkers often get the chance to support some of the most 'hard to reach children', young people and their families and provide children most vulnerable to offending or engaging in anti-social or risky behaviour with a safe place that they can call their own and where they can develop a sense of community.

Staffed Open access play facilities (eg Adventure Playgrounds)

The advantages of staffed open access, free play provision is:

- It takes a child-centred approach (designed for children to specifically enjoy), but is open and welcoming for parents to attend.
- If it is free of charge so that any child can attend, not just those children whose parents can afford to pay for it. This means effectively that every child who wants to come in can - *Every Child Matters*.
- If it is staffed / supervised by qualified playworkers that will ensure a varied and active timetable of exciting activities, and be able to refer parents to appropriate organisations/ support groups etc according to their specific needs.

What other areas could be considered and what more could we do?

Reducing obesity

The Health White paper²⁷ highlighted reduced play opportunities as one of the contributory factors to increases in childhood obesity. *The British Medical Journal*²⁸ reported in 2001 that there is 'an obesity epidemic in young (pre-school) children' and that the main solution should be to 'reduce television viewing and promote playing'. The report identifies that 'opportunities for spontaneous play may be the only requirement that young children need to increase their physical activity.' A study by University College London²⁹ in 2004 highlighted the benefit of unstructured play for children. It concluded that 'walking and playing provide children with more physical

²⁶ K Warpole (2003), No particular place to go: Children, young people and public space: Birmingham, Groundwork

²⁷ Department for Health (2004) Choosing health: Making healthier choices. Department for Health www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAnd

²⁸ *The British Medical Journal* (Vol. 322) 10 February 2001 (www.bmj.bmjournals.com)

²⁹ Professor Roger Mackett (2004) UCL Making Children's Lives More Active, Centre for Transport Studies

activity than most other activities'. The Mental Health Foundation has reported³⁰ that the increasingly limited amount of time children have to play outside or to attend supervised play projects is a causative factor in the rise of mental ill health in young people.

Evidence shows clearly that outdoor play is crucial to children's healthy development. If DCSF neglects addressing this need, they risk missing one of the most obvious and cost-effective solutions to improving not only children's physical health but also their opportunities for social and emotional development.

Reducing anti social behaviour

Children and young people need places to go that are free of charge and where they are free to choose their own activities. Good play provision, which offers those seeking it genuine challenge and excitement, can help prevent bored children and young people behaving in ways that are socially unacceptable. Improved play space design should be seen as part of the solution in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

An evaluation of one adventure playground in an area of multiple deprivation showed how juvenile crime fell by 54 per cent in its first five years of operation. Users indicated that it had kept them away from crime and the risk of drugs.³¹ Other projects examined by Thames Valley Police, showed significant reduction in vandalism and petty crime following the installation of play facilities and a youth shelter.³²

Other evaluations of play projects have shown how they can contribute to improving connections and building trust between local communities.³³ *Prove it* is an approach to evaluation that has been piloted in outside play and recreation spaces and has been shown to have a measurable impact on local interaction, new friendships, community know-how and community safety.³⁴

Protecting vulnerable children and young people

How can we tackle inequalities in prevention of accidents? What role could national or local organisations play?

Again here we need to address concerns with road traffic as dying in a road traffic accident is much more likely for children from low-income families.³⁵ As already motioned Homezones and traffic claming zones concentrated in areas where there are high concentrations of deprivations, would work towards combating this inequality.

³⁰ The Mental Health Foundation (2000) *Bright Futures: promoting children and young people's mental health*

³¹ Hill-Trout, J Lindsell, S and Pithouse, A (1995) *Evaluation of the Venture Caia Park*. Wrexham: Executive Summary, Cardiff: University Wales.

³² Hampshire, R and Wilkinson, S (1999) *Youth Shelters and Sports Systems: A good practice guide*. London: Thames Police.

³³ Youlden, P and Harrison S (2006) *The Better Play Programme: An evaluation*. London: Children's Play Council.

³⁴ New Economics Foundation (2001) *Prove it: Measuring impacts of renewal*. London: New Economics Foundation.

³⁵ Social Exclusion Unit (2003) *Making the connections: final report on transport and social exclusion*. London, Social Exclusion Unit

This needs to be combined with freely available supervised play services. For example, staffed adventure playgrounds or play rangers projects should be provided where the concentration of children and the premium on space is demanding.

Whose responsibility should it be to address bullying that happens outside school? How could local agencies work together to address this problem?

Supervised and semi supervised play provision, if adequately funded, could play a key role in addressing bullying that happens outside school. Schools as part of extended services should be working in partnership with play and youth provision to ensure there is a full range of informal provision available to children and young people.

It is the responsibility of planning departments to ensure that parks and green space are designed with children and young people in mind. That is, they are in close proximity of their homes, accessible and well maintained. Also, with the right training and support, park offices, wardens and community police have a very important role in addressing bullying and providing informal supervision in parks and open spaces.

Responding when children and young people have been harmed

Targeted Play Provision

Targeted play provision and specialist intervention works at different levels of need and vulnerability. In some areas, play projects and playwork skills are specifically designed and used to support children who are having major social problems and are currently unable to use mainstream services. For example, a London Borough of Camden play project, specifically for children and families living in temporary accommodation (hotels, hostels and bed and breakfast accommodation), recognises the impact of difficult housing conditions on children's opportunities to play and develop. The project also works with a large number of children in refugee and asylum-seeking families, who need specific support to enable them to learn about and join mainstream services.

Similar projects in Swindon support the needs of vulnerable children by offering a play service in a hostel for homeless families, a toddler group for hearing impaired toddlers and their hearing siblings, and an out of school worker in a mainstream group supporting the inclusion of a variety of different children with additional needs. They also offer funding to support working parents using full day care with inclusion support so childcare is no more expensive for them. The training team has organised extended childcare courses in Sure Start and Children's Centre areas to support parents and attached childcare.

In addition, the London Borough of Camden operates *Building Bridges*, a specialist play project, managed by the council's play service, for children aged from four to 15 years. The service is for children whose challenging behaviour makes it difficult for them to access mainstream services, including school and out of school provision, or who are rejecting or 'shutting down' in mainstream services and not getting a positive experience. All of the children are from families with a range of problems including alcohol or drug misuse, mental health issues and domestic violence.

The project uses play in order to support children to:

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- develop self-esteem and feel empowered and included
- learn how to resolve conflicts in a non-aggressive way
- become more resilient in coping with difficult situations in their families
- have fun and be children.

The children are supported by experienced playworkers who generally have complementary experience and training in other fields such as education or social work. The work is a mixture of individual sessions with a dedicated member of staff or small group work sessions. The sessions incorporate structured play activities such as arts, crafts, drama, photography and video and sports. The project has clear boundaries and expectations around behaviour and playworkers use circle time to give a safe space for children to talk and share their thoughts and feelings.

Work with individual children is assessed against planned objectives and reported back to commissioning agencies, such as Children's Safeguarding and Social Care (formerly Social Services) and Schools. One particular strength of the project is how, based on close partnership working, its work complements and supports the work of Pupil Referral Units.

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i Play Board (2006) Giving Priority to Play: Play Board Northern Ireland