



Coronavirus

Play Matters

more than it ever did!



Presently, we are all experiencing many changes in our normal routines and lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coronavirus has changed everything including our children's normal routines and access to their usual play environments. Normally places of education and learning, schools have now been appropriated as places of care and safety for the families of essential front line keyworkers. So, for schools and for our children it isn't business as usual!

This information sheet has been designed in cooperation with the Department of Education's Play Matters project, to assist teachers, playworkers, parents and those offering care to children in these challenging times, to consider how they might provide quality play opportunities and experiences.

Regardless of the back drop it is important to remember that children still want and need to play. Play and playing continues to be an essential aspect of children's lives. According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) opportunities for play have a significant role in helping children recover a sense of normality and joy after their experience of loss, dislocation and trauma.

Remember, play and playing provides valuable coping and learning opportunities for children. As children work through their emotions and feelings at this difficult time, play will help them deal with uncertainty, help them relax and importantly allow them to have fun.

Taking Our Play Seriously in Schools

1 Play Approach

You may be working with new people, teachers or playworkers from other schools or settings so it might be useful to collectively consider your views on play and agree a joint approach prior to the children arriving. Some people like to have a structured environment, whereas others are a bit more chaotic and laid back in their approach. Children need to have consistent messages and permissions to explore and manipulate resources and their environment. To avoid mixed messages, spending some time on developing an agreed strategy or policy on play and managing difficult situations will be time well spent.

2 Planning

Make lots of time for play every day! Don't be tempted to plan for learning outcomes. Play is a natural and instinctive mode of learning. Provide lots of free and found resources and let the children take the lead. It is important to take a step back and let the children be in charge of their play. Think about providing lots of space and time to play throughout the day. You will quickly see that whilst having fun, numeracy, literacy and science concepts are being covered by the children organically.

3 Free Play

During free play children decide what they want to do, when they want to do it, and how they want to do it. The benefits of unstructured play are wide-ranging. We know that when children have more opportunities for free play, they have better physical and mental health. It significantly decreases their stress levels which in turn will help facilitate learning.

Many children have an area of interest or hobby. This could be football, space, animals, music or TV characters or it could be collecting objects. Now would be a great time to encourage them to develop their own project based around their special interest. This could include drawing, writing stories or poetry, collecting images from the internet, taking photographs, interviewing others (via social media if need-be) about their experience of a particular subject, and putting it all together into a scrapbook, notebook or folder.

4 Make Time To Talk

During this time of unprecedented change, many children may be feeling uncertain, have a lack of control and most likely be experiencing anxiety. It is therefore really important that they have space and opportunities to talk about their feelings. This can be done in a playful way or through role play or stories. Find a strategy that works best for your children.

5 Keep In Touch

Children will be missing friends and family too. Explore innovative and novel ways for them to communicate with others – write letters or send cards and pictures to relatives. Link in with friends via social media apps.

6 Get Outdoors

It's really important for children to have access to the outdoors, whether at home or in the school environment. Fresh air, space to let off steam and natural daylight are all vital for children's health and well-being. Follow health advice at www.publichealth.hscni.net and activity guidelines at www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report and make sure to have some time outdoors every day.

7 Loose Parts Play Objects

Loose parts play can stimulate creativity, imagination, learning and problem solving. A 'loose part' play object is any open ended (age appropriate) resource or material that children can use in a range of different ways, for example scrap paper, empty cartons, pots and pans, pegs, twigs, pebbles, old cloths, sheets, leaves – basically anything can be a loose part. Download our Play Matters information sheets for ideas at www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/

8 Hygiene

Make sure that play resources and materials can be cleaned to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Use resources that can be cleaned easily or thrown away after use. Everyday household objects are great fun to play with. Don't forget to encourage lots of playful handwashing activity too. Get the latest health advice at www.publichealth.hscni.net

Remember

- Play is a fundamental part of childhood
- Children's play is essential for healthy development and well-being
- It is a legitimate behaviour and a human right of all children
- In situations of conflict or disaster, opportunities for play have a significant therapeutic and rehabilitative role in helping children recover a sense of normality and joy after their experience of loss, dislocation and trauma.
- Stay up-to-date with the latest health advice and guidance at www.publichealth.hscni.net



Department of
Education



Children and
Young People's Strategy

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

**WE ALL
MUST DO IT
TO GET
THROUGH IT**



STAY HOME



KEEP DISTANCE



WASH HANDS

For more information download 'Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis. Play: Rights and Practice' at: <http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IPA-A4-ACCESS-TO-PLAY-IN-SITUATIONS-OF-CRISIS-TOOLKIT-LR.pdf>

This flier should be read in conjunction with <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/implementing-social-distancing-education-settings-ni-coronavirus-covid-19> - Published 2 April 2020

For play ideas, resources and to sign up for free membership go to:

<https://www.playboard.org/>

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