

Revised Sure Start Children's Centre Play Policy

Approved on 13.12.11¹

1. What we mean by 'play'

'Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.' (Play England Charter for Children's Play November 2009).

Southampton supports the right of every child to play and developed a city wide Play Policy in December 2003. This play policy underpins all the city's play services.

2. Play in Early Years

Play is how children enjoy themselves and is in their early years the fundamental way in which they learn and develop.

This is recognised in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); 'Children do not separate their experiences into play and learning since they learn as they play and can have fun while they learn; there are therefore many contexts for children's learning' (EYFS: Effective Practice 2007).

The 2011 independent review of EYFS also supports a 'focus on play' and that 'this should be retained as one of the foundations of the EYFS;' as 'play helps young children to develop the skills they need to become good learners – for example helping children to develop flexibility of thought, build their confidence, and see problems from different perspectives.' (The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning 2011).

3. Play in Children's Centres

This Children's Centres Play Policy is the result of collaboration between families, play team practitioners and co-ordinators.

The aim is to create a policy and guidance for staff and families that is clear and easy to use.

4. All Children's Centres play activities will aim to:

- Enable children and families to learn and **develop** to improve confidence and skills through 'playful learning'(EYFS: Learning and development);
- Be **child centred** and encourage parents to follow their child's lead and interests;
- Encourage families to **enjoy** play at home in the 'home learning environment' (Positive Relationships);
- Support families to stay **safe** and protected from harm, while at the same time 'encouraging children to explore boundaries' (ECM: Staying Safe)
- Promote **active** and healthy lifestyles (Healthy Child Programme DoH);

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- Encourage all children and families to **join in** and participate by reflecting and celebrating cultural diversity and promoting inclusive practice;
- Provide **choice** within each session and across the play provision;
- Promote **healthy** conversations to empower parents in planning for their families.

The roots of play are built upon positive relationships between parents and their children. We will support families by employing a qualified and skilled foundation years play workforce that works alongside families and role models good practice.

The focus is on creating high quality play environments, having the right risk-benefit policy, communicating with parents, improving health outcomes and achieving development goals within the EYFS, and very much on ensuring young children, parents/carers (and staff!) have lots of fun.

5. A Local Approach

Each Children Centre has resources based on local need and have developed flexible and child and parent focussed programmes.

Each core offer area offers a range of open access play sessions (stay and play, let's play together, baby play, dad's clubs etc), crèches and targeted support that have clear aims and objectives.

Each centre employs a foundation years play team to deliver play provision as part of the multi-disciplinary service to children and families.

The foundation years play team is play specific qualified and skilled and reflects local diversity through a workforce development 'grow your own' model.

The foundation years play team is responsible for the direct delivery of quality play sessions supported by lead practitioners and management.

We ensure that the impact and outcomes of play are monitored and evaluated robustly through a locally developed quality play assurance toolkit linked to the EYFS.

6. Play Services provided in Children Centres

Principles

All staff will adhere to the following principles within their work:

- All children have a right to good quality play
- Play enables children to explore and understand the world around them and is their primary route to learning.
- Parents are children's first educators.
- The child's voice will be promoted in planning and delivering services.
- Working collaboratively within a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency team.

Children's Centres will provide the following services:-

- Employing, training and developing a pool of permanent and sessional foundation years play workers to deliver a number of play sessions and crèches per week over a minimum of 48 weeks per annum to support Sure Start activities.
- Ensuring that play and crèche provision is of a high quality in terms of personnel, resources and environment and are registered with OFSTED as required.
- Maximising the play opportunities for children to be physically active through families, early years and childcare support to sustain habits for later life.
- Providing needs led groups within designated areas, e.g. Stay and Play/Let's Play Together drop-ins, to role model and provide information to parents/carers about the importance of play and other appropriate groups and services and encourage attendance as necessary.
- Supporting initiatives to strengthen/improve/increase the provision of good quality, affordable early years and childcare within the area.
- Providing outreach and targeted support to those families who are vulnerable or isolated and who find services hard to reach. Supporting entry into group provision where possible and identifying families where longer term targeted support work may be necessary.
- Providing and promoting opportunities for volunteering within play, crèche and other early years provision within the Children Centre area.

7. Objectives of the Service

The play service will contribute towards the following objectives:

Objective 1 – Improving Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- To assist children in developing their full potential through securing self-esteem and self-worth.
- To provide opportunities for the early identification of children with social, health and educational needs.

- To provide support to children and families by focusing on the parent/child play relationship and encouraging a positive nurturing approach to parenting.

Objective 2 – Improving Communication, Physical Development and the Ability to Learn

- Stimulating children through play – leading to improved physical, communication and language development, concentration, social skills and independent activities now and in preparation for school and to sustain habits for life.
- To provide good quality play and opportunities for parental involvement in their children’s play. To support parents in understanding the value and importance of play.

Objective 3 – Strengthening Families and Communities

- To assist through working collaboratively with the local multi-disciplinary team in the early identification of unmet needs and to contribute to families positive experience of child and family support services.
- Effectively signpost to wider Children Centre support.
- Promoting inclusion and celebrating cultural diversity.

8. Scope of the Service

- Services will be delivered in a flexible way in order to meet the needs of the families within designated Children’s Centres areas and across the city.
- The Children’s Centre management team will agree with the foundation years play team the local play programme and individual play and crèche sessions objectives.

Appendix 1. Play Policy guide for families and practitioners

