

# Play after lockdown—a summary of Play England’s briefing paper

## Context:

Coronavirus has had a huge impact on children’s play;

- Where they play,
- the degree of freedom they experience ,
- Choice of what they do and how they do it.

In a recent UNICEF study, 2 in 5 children in the UK reported feeling anxious and worried, while 62% worried about the impact of coronavirus on their lives.

Children will need time to re-integrate and socialise outside of their home environment and physical activity and play has an important role in this.

## Risk assessment:

Professionals have to strike a balance between children and young people’s need for fun, excitement and challenge, with the need to keep them safe from unacceptable risk of harm.

An element of risk taking in children’s play is beneficial. Risk helps the development of physical skills such as walking, cycling, climbing, swimming, learning to fall safely, balance, life skills, social skills, experiencing failure and learning to recover, resilience, health, fitness, exhilaration and fun, self-esteem, self-awareness and ability to make judgements and to deal with risk and challenge.

Learning to cope with failure and manage emotions like fear, anger and a degree of distress are essential life skills.

## Play and Wellbeing:

There’s a wealth of national and international evidence showing a strong positive relationship between physical activity and mental and emotional wellbeing.

Being active improves sleep, maintains healthy weight, builds confidence and social skills, develops coordination, improves concentration and learning, develops healthy bones and a healthy body, and makes you feel good.

Playing and being physically active with friends can provide a buffer to anxiety and stress and for children experiencing loneliness having someone to play with makes a big difference.

Playing helps children to express themselves in a safe environment to build empathy and to make sense of what has happened.

## Covid19:

The evidence suggests that transmission of Coronavirus is much less outdoors, so think about games, sports and activities that children can do individually, in pairs, or in small groups whilst socially distancing.

Tennis, junior golf, running, jumping, skipping, bowling, chalking, hopscotch and many other games can be adapted for a small number of children maintaining social distancing.

Risk benefit assessments will have to be reviewed in view of Coronavirus guidance and new procedures put in place.

A written risk benefit assessment should be carried out for all areas where children play including (but not limited to) playgrounds and equipment taking the virus into account.

## What form of play?

Children love to be able to move and adapt the environment for themselves, e.g. moving things around and adapting their use.

Introducing a range of items that can be washed down and disinfected in between use, will greatly increase the range of play that children can enjoy. Anything that rolls or has wheels will work well in a school playground or a street, including balls, skittles, tubes, scooters or bicycles.

Think about how children can have as much freedom and control in their play as possible with minimal adult intervention.

Encourage children and parents to bring appropriate clothing, e.g. wellies, outdoor clothes, towels or overalls so that children can experience outdoor play in all weathers or messy play indoors.

## Involving children as decision makers:

Participation should be an active and ongoing process involving children in decision making from day to day activities to wider decisions about how a project is run.

Children’s participation increases ownership of their play spaces and the ability to feel in control as far as is reasonably practicable.

