

What is Open Access Playwork?

Open Access Playwork in Wales refers to a form of supervised play provision where children can come and go as they please, without the need for prior registration or payment. This type of playwork is typically offered in public spaces like parks, playgrounds, and community centres, and it is designed to be inclusive and accessible to all children, regardless of their background.

Key Features of Open Access Playwork:

1. **Free Access:** Children do not need to pay to participate, making it accessible to families from all economic backgrounds.
2. **Voluntary Participation:** Children choose when and how they participate. They are free to come and go as they wish.
3. **Child-Centered Approach:** The focus is on providing children with opportunities for freely chosen, self-directed, and intrinsically motivated play, allowing them to make their own choices about what and how they play.
4. **Qualified Playworkers:** Playwork is often facilitated by trained playworkers who support children's play without directing or controlling it. Their role is to create a safe and stimulating environment where children can explore and engage in play freely.
5. **Community and Social Benefits:** Open Access Playwork often helps build community cohesion by bringing together children from different backgrounds. It also supports children's physical, social, and emotional development.

Importance in Wales:

The Welsh Government recognises play as a fundamental right for children and young people, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Wales was the first country to legislate for children's play, and Open Access Playwork is a key component of this commitment. It provides vital opportunities for children to engage in play in a safe environment, which is essential for their overall development and well-being.

What is Supervised unstructured Playwork?

Supervised Unstructured Playwork is a type of playwork where children are given the freedom to engage in self-directed, spontaneous play in a safe environment, with the presence of adults (playworkers) who supervise but do not direct or control the play. This approach emphasizes the importance of allowing children to explore, create, and interact in ways that are driven by their own interests and instincts, rather than by structured activities or adult-imposed rules.

Key Elements of Supervised Unstructured Playwork:

1. **Unstructured Play:**
 - Children are free to decide what they want to do, how they want to do it, and with whom they want to play. There is no fixed agenda or planned activities.
 - The play is child-led, meaning children can follow their own ideas and imagination, leading to creative and exploratory play experiences.

2. Supervision:

- Qualified playworkers are present to ensure the safety of the children and the environment. Their role is to observe and support the play without intervening unless necessary for safety or to facilitate inclusion.
- Playworkers may provide resources or materials that children can use, but they do not dictate how these should be used.

3. Child-Centered Approach:

- The focus is on the needs and interests of the children. Playworkers respect children's choices and provide an environment where they feel empowered to play freely.
- This approach acknowledges the importance of play in a child's development, allowing them to learn social skills, problem-solving, and creativity through their own experiences.

4. Flexible Environment:

- The play environment is designed to be adaptable, with a variety of materials and resources available for children to use as they wish.
- Natural elements, loose parts (like sticks, stones, and cardboard), and open-ended materials are often used to encourage imaginative play (such as tyres, rope, straps, pans and more).

5. Safety and Risk Management:

- While children are allowed to take risks in their play, which is important for learning and development, playworkers are there to manage these risks to ensure that they do not lead to harm.
- The balance between allowing risk and ensuring safety is a crucial aspect of supervised unstructured playwork.

Importance of Supervised Unstructured Playwork:

This form of playwork is vital for children's holistic development. It supports:

- **Physical Development:** Through activities like running, climbing, and building.
- **Cognitive Development:** As children engage in problem-solving, decision-making, and creative thinking.
- **Social and Emotional Development:** By interacting with peers, negotiating rules, and expressing emotions in a safe space.

Supervised unstructured playwork is especially important in today's world, where children's lives can often be overly structured with adults and organised activities. It provides a necessary counterbalance, allowing children the freedom to play in a way that fosters independence and resilience.

What are the Playwork Principles?

The Playwork Principles in Wales are a set of guidelines that underpin the practice of playwork across the country. These principles are designed to ensure that the playwork profession maintains a child-centered approach, respecting the importance of play in children's lives and promoting environments where children can play freely and safely. The Playwork Principles were first established by the Playwork Principles

Scrutiny Group in 2005 and are widely recognised in Wales as the foundation for quality playwork practice.

The Playwork Principles in Wales:

- 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.
- 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 also 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.

[The Playwork Principles - Play Wales](#)

Importance of the Playwork Principles:

The Playwork Principles are crucial in ensuring that the practice of playwork in Wales remains focused on the needs and rights of children. They guide playworkers in creating environments where children can play freely, explore, take risks, and learn in ways that are meaningful to them. These principles also align with broader commitments in Wales, such as the recognition of children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

By adhering to these principles, playworkers help to foster environments that support the holistic development of children, ensuring that play remains a central part of childhood.