



Making Community Events Playful

Exciting events are taking place in Britain this summer, with many communities getting together and celebrating by organising street parties or other community events. These are ideal opportunities to meet with other people of all ages in a fun and friendly way within the neighbourhood – and to promote the importance of play at community events.

Ensuring that community events are playful means that children, young people and adults can meet and spend time alongside each other in a relaxed way. When children are given the opportunity to play they meet and get to know other children and adults in the neighbourhood, building familiarity, trust and a community spirit. This helps parents to gain confidence to allow children to play out at other times of the year.

Many parents limit children's time to play out freely due to increased traffic density, perceived danger from adults who may pose a threat to children, lack of safe places to play, increased television and computer use and sometimes a negative view of playing children by other members of the community.

Children like to play out near home as it provides the opportunity to meet up and socialise with their friends outside school. A 2007 poll found that 71% of adults played out on their street every day compared with only 21% of children today (ICM poll, 2007).

Most of us remember the joy and freedom of playing out as children. The benefits were enormous:

- We met and had adventures with friends
- We knew our own neighbourhood inside out and travelled around it freely
- We got to know the characteristics of local people, who to trust and who to avoid, and they got to know us
- We were physically active, self-reliant, resourceful and independent.

Giving children permission to play out close to their home and those of their friends helps them gain an understanding of the world they live in, as they learn to deal with situations outside the home, without being too far away from adults. This is an important step to gaining self-reliance and greater independence for going to the park, the local shop or walking to school, or other local places on their own.

Organising a community event or street party that recognises the importance of children playing and having fun is a great way to support a child's right and need to play within the neighbourhood.

Preparing for a playful community event

There are many resources available to support the logistics of organising a street or community event that is playful – from identifying roles and responsibilities to getting permissions for street closures.



These can be found at:

Neighbours Street Party Guide:

www.streetparty.org.uk/residents/street-play.aspx

Playing Out website: <http://playingout.net/>

Playday planning your event guidance:

www.playday.org.uk/playday_events/planning_your_event.aspx

Many adults wanting to organise a community event may be put off by concerns about health and safety and liabilities. The liability during a street party or closure is no different than on any normal street on another day – everyone is responsible for their own actions (and those of their children). This means that being well prepared, taking good care and being sensible and respectful about other people and their property is important. Parents are ultimately responsible for their own children. It is a good idea to remind them either on the day or through any information you provide about the event.

It is worth remembering that a formal risk assessment is not a legal requirement for a street party or community event. To ensure that those organising an event of this

nature are not overburdened with concerns, thinking through the event beforehand and asking 'What if...?' questions will help prepare for the day. Preparing written answers that address any potential eventualities and signing and dating it as a record of how you have thought-out particular worries will show that you have made consideration to managing any risks involved. Some of the questions can relate to lost children or someone sustaining an injury. When thinking about the answers to any 'What if...?' questions, it is just as important to think about the benefits of what will be provided, as well as the worst-case scenarios.

A playful event does not need any specialist equipment, such as bouncy castles. The aim is to provide time, space and permission to play. However, if you choose to book such a service, remember to ask the suppliers if they have their own insurance. This insurance will only cover the equipment and not the personal safety of those using it.

Preparing the space for play will be an essential part of the event organisation. Firstly, restrict vehicles moving within the space to make it safer for participants and organisers to set up. This can be done with signs to signify restricted vehicle access, or road cones or similar to provide an

obstruction. Any obstructions will need to be easily removable, should an emergency vehicle need access. Having a volunteer to 'steward' the road blocks/entrances will help manage any cars attempting to gain access to the space. Once the blocks/entrances have been established clearing the space of any litter, glass or dog mess can begin. Keep Wales Tidy may be able to provide equipment and resources if necessary: www.keepwalestidy.org/index

Creating a playful experience

Organising a playful community event can often be seen by adults as the need to provide activities for children to 'do'. This is not the case, as children will find ways to play given the time, space, freedom and stuff to play with. Considering how these elements can be included in an event will make it more playful and prevent children from being bored by offering choice and play value for a wide range of interests and abilities to play in their own way.

Older people in the community may enjoy sitting, watching and listening to children at play. By providing seating such as garden or camping chairs, they will appreciate being included in the event. Seating will also help parents step back, chat with neighbours and enjoy the event. Taking photos throughout the event, of children and adults enjoying themselves is a good way to document the occasion, and demonstrate to others what happened through reports in community newsletters and other local publications.

Children and families can be very resourceful and creative in the way the space is used and what can be played with. Paddling pools, sofas, chairs, bicycles, scooters, hoops, stilts and bubbles are resources that are usually easily and readily available. When items are brought out to a community event, children can share them and they can be used in an unstructured, informal way. Remembering how you played as a child can help to draw up a list of things

that can be provided, then step back and let children play without interrupting or telling them how to do it. If children ask for help or for ideas adults should get involved – if invited to do so. Just remember not to take over, or children will lose interest and stop playing.



Here are some simple low cost ideas:

Water – great for cool fun on a warm day

- Paddling pools or large trays of water with pans, jugs and bath toys – great for smaller children
- Tarpaulin sheets laid flat or down a slope make great water slides, adding washing up liquid and a bucket of water or two
- Buckets and sponges for water fights

Sand and mud – building sand castles and making mud pies

- Sheets of tarpaulin or large flower pots/ planters/trays to hold the sand or mud
- Bowls, sieves, trowels, spades, plastic tubs, yoghurt pots for digging and making moulds

Building – for making dens and other structures

- Cardboard boxes
- Sheets of fabric, old sheets and blankets, tarpaulins
- Wood, nails, hammers, saws (good idea to keep a close watchful eye)
- Duct tape, sticky tape
- Bamboo garden canes
- Old pallets
- Rope

Climbing and balancing – for providing challenge

- Chairs, or wood blocks, old tyres and bricks for balancing planks of wood on to walk across
- Other suitable props for balancing planks of wood on to make ramps for walking on/riding skateboards or making balance boards
- Tin can stilts for younger children
- Assault courses

Getting creative

- Chalks for pavements and tarmac (easily washed away with plenty of water after the event)
- Scrap or recyclable materials such as yoghurt pots, egg boxes, cereal boxes, carpet tubes, old rolls of wallpaper, paper, straws
- Water based paint, pens, glue, glitter, tape, string
- Old clothes and curtains for dressing up



Getting messy

- Shaving foam in trays and bowls
- Cooked pasta (especially spaghetti) coloured with food dye
- Cornflour mixed with a little water to make gloop
- Homemade play dough

Getting physical

- Ropes for skipping games
- Hoops, balls and frisbees
- Make sure there are some dedicated open spaces to run, play tag, ride bikes or play with balls and frisbees
- Old pillows for pillow fights

Sourcing resources

- Ask local businesses if they have recyclable resources that could be used for playing such as carpet tubes and large cardboard boxes
- Ask local people to collect household scrap such as bottles, yoghurt pots, plastic tubs, egg boxes and toilet rolls
- Look in the garden shed for old flowerpots, seed trays, rope and other such equipment that is easily cleaned and appropriate
- Find out where your nearest play resource centre is and visit if possible:

www.playwales.org.uk/page.asp?id=78

- Contact your local toy library to see if there are items you can borrow. The local family information service within the local council should be able to provide contact details.



Top tips for a playful community

To encourage parents and carers and local communities to support children playing out confidently beyond any organised event, these top tips may help:

1. Prepare children to be road safe

Streets make up the major part of public space within communities. We can prepare children from an early age by telling them and showing them ways to keep themselves safe on and around roads.

2. Look to our own driving habits

Parents are often concerned about traffic when giving children permission to play out. As drivers, we can drive at safe speeds in the same way we would wish others to drive in the residential streets where our children play.

3. Help children get to know their neighbourhood

If we are less reliant on travelling by car ourselves in our local communities, children will get to know their local streets. Walking to and from local facilities such as the shops, school and the park can help us identify solutions together with our children to keep themselves safe.

4. Be community friendly

We can get to know local people, neighbours and other families, and agree with each other to keep an eye out for children. This fosters a sense of a safe community, allowing more children to play out more, and to be safer doing so.

5. Trust children

We can make agreements with children on where and how long they go out to play. If they know their local area, their address and phone number, and whom they can call on, and tell the time, it helps to make those arrangements.

6. Be realistic

Keeping our worries in perspective and knowing neighbours and local residents on which you can call if you have any concerns will help. The benefits of playing out far outweigh the risks.

7. Make a change

We can join with others locally to campaign for changes to our neighbourhood that may make our local areas places where children can play out confidently. We can promote the importance of playing out to other people within our neighbourhoods by word of mouth or holding community events and letting others know about them.



After the event

You may want to consider celebrating and enjoying your achievements during the event to let other people know how successful it was – remember to thank everyone involved. Writing a brief article about the event (including a photo or two) that can be circulated locally can help promote the idea of playing out in the community beyond the event. It may be possible to report on the event in a local newsletter or newspaper to share the idea with others. This can be useful to remind people how important children are to our communities and how important good outdoor play experiences are to them.



www.playwales.org.uk

Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.

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