



SPACE TO PLAY



A Design Toolkit
for Outdoor Play in Registered Childcare Provision

PLAYBOARD NI



About PlayBoard:

PlayBoard is the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland. Since its establishment in 1985, PlayBoard has been committed to supporting the child's right to play through a combination of service delivery and development; campaigning and lobbying; awareness raising and working in partnership with others to put play on the agenda of policy makers and resource providers.

PlayBoard works from the premise that play is fundamental to a healthy and happy childhood and the organisation takes every possible opportunity to promote, develop and create inspiring play opportunities for children.



Our Mission:

Leading the play agenda.



Our Vision:

'A society where the right to play is both valued and realised'.



"Quality care is influenced by many factors, some of which, like room size and food and drink are easily measured and others, such as the ethos of care, development and play, are less obvious" (**Minimum Standards, 2012**)¹



Disclaimer:

The information and guidance provided in this manual was accurate at the time of going to print. PlayBoard NI is not responsible for any changes in legislation which occur following publication or any misinterpretation of the information contained within this document.

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Space To Play was prepared through an extensive process of research, consultation and participation with organisations' and individuals representing the wide interests of registered childcare in Northern Ireland.

The pictures of play spaces and children at play in this document have been gathered from a range of sources, consent was sought for the use of all images (where available). Thanks to Play England for the use of the roundabout visual image, which inspired the development of this toolkit.

Thanks to the wide range of individuals and their sponsoring organisations for providing time and input. The reference group included representatives from:

✓ Inspection teams from Social Services

✓ Early Years Membership Organisations

✓ Playwork Advisors

✓ Agents of the Childcare Partnership

✓ Community and voluntary groups

✓ Early Years Advisors (2 year old Programme)

Using this Design Toolkit

Play is an intrinsic aspect of children and young people's lives. Play challenges and informs our understanding of children and young people because it views children as competent and confident human beings.

By using this resource you will gain a better understanding of the need for play and the importance of being creative and inclusive when planning, designing and implementing outdoor play space. Whilst **Space to Play** is primarily focused on outdoor play space development within registered childcare settings many of the underlying principles and approaches outlined are transferable to a range of wider settings. The document is intended to inform all sequential stages of development for any outdoor play project.

Using the visual of a roundabout the document is divided into 6 colour coded design stages. Each stage, offers relevant information, guidance and support. Depending on your circumstances or specific needs some stages will be more relevant than others. You are encouraged to dip in and out of the document as required. The images used throughout are intended to reflect and expand on the text. We would encourage you to conduct further research as you will also have a vision for your desired end product.



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INTRODUCTION



When we say that something is child's play, it is commonly understood to mean that it is easy to accomplish and that not much thought or effort is required to deliver it. This however trivialises the importance of play and undermines the need for effective planning and design of spaces for play.

Regardless of where it takes place, either indoors or outdoors play is a serious business for children as it is intrinsic to all aspects of their happiness, health, well-being, learning and development.

Having regular opportunities to engage in outdoor play has been shown to be particularly important for children as it helps to provide structure for their social development, helps to develop imagination and creativity and encourages engagement in physical activity. Despite its many benefits research highlights that for many children, opportunities to play outdoors are on the decline. A number of factors are often cited:

Factors That Prohibit Play:

- Parental fears of dangerous strangers and older youth;
- Neighbourhood fears, such as traffic and the community feeling generally unsafe;
- A lack of accessible, playable outdoor spaces within our communities, and
- Practitioners' on the whole feeling less confident and comfortable about what they can or should provide in outdoor play spaces.

It is important at the outset to recognise that due to environmental constraints and site limitations (size, layout, topography etc.) not all outdoor play spaces are or can be created equally. The role of the registered setting is to maximise the value and usability of the available outdoor space in order to best meet the needs of both the children and the practitioners’.

Regardless of the limitations of your outdoor space you should seek to ensure that it is as engaging and stimulating as possible. Remember that an effective play space doesn’t always have to be large and complex. With a little imagination, good planning and an understanding of children’s play needs it is possible to create and maintain a small and simple outdoor space that delivers excitement, stimulation and offers a high level of play value.

The information contained within **Space to Play** has been collected from a wide range of source material and collated with the view to providing the reader with a useful reference tool for thinking about and designing play space.

Images of outdoor play and play space are offered throughout this resource by way of creative stimulation. Regardless of your individual circumstances, whether your outdoor space is large or small you may wish to replicate some of the ideas and examples within your setting. When introducing new ideas and approaches remember to test them out and review their impact (plan, do, review) - what works in one setting may not work in another, but you won’t know unless you try! Large or small there is no reason why you should not aspire for your outdoor play space to be of good quality in both design and delivery.

Who’s this Toolkit for?

Space to Play has been researched and tailored to meet the needs of Early Years practitioners’ working within all registered childcare settings.

It is widely recognised that outdoor play can increase the quality of child care and early childhood educational experiences. Quality outdoor play experiences can help to close the achievement gap and increase children’s readiness to learn whilst in school. Yet many child care settings and in some instances our schools have limited access to outdoor play space, and those that do often fall short of being rich environments for play.

The primary audience for Space to Play is service providers’ who in adhering to the ‘Minimum Standards’ wish to develop creative and innovative outdoor play spaces and find ways to evaluate the quality of the play experience offered by their provision. The Minimum Standards were developed to provide a consistent regional approach to the registration and inspection of services, thus ensuring consistent levels of quality in registered services.

The information included will be relevant to anyone who has an interest in, or role in, the delivery, registration, inspection or governance of registered Childcare in Northern Ireland. Parents, funders and technical designers may also find the resource useful as it provides advice and guidance on how best to promote, develop and enhance outdoor play opportunities.

Childcare Registration and Settings

Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts are responsible for registering and inspecting childcare services against the requirements laid down in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995². To provide assurance of a consistent regional approach to registration, inspection and quality in setting the Minimum Standards for Day Care and Childminding for Children Under Age 12 were developed.

In Northern Ireland there are three categories of childcare settings that are required to register with Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, these are Childminders, Full Day Care and Sessional Day Care.

- 1** Childminders are self-employed day care providers who work in their own homes to provide care and play for other people's children in a family setting.
- 2** Full day care is care for children aged 0-12 years for a continuous period of four hours or more in any day in premises which are not domestic.
- 3** Sessional day care is defined as day care for children which covers less than a continuous period of four hours in any day, this covers crèches, preschool sessional care, out of school clubs (including breakfast clubs) and the Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds. Wraparound care is also covered by the standards on sessional care.

Childcare is provided in a range of settings across Northern Ireland from large-scale, purpose built centres through to the homes of individual child-minders. Regardless of the size of the setting, the information contained in **Space to Play** is intended to support good practice in the development and improvement of outdoor play spaces in all registered childcare settings.

Depending on the size, scale and scope of your outdoor play project, the design, development and implementation may involve different people with different knowledge and skills. In a large project you may be working with designers and contractors. Alternatively, at the other end of the spectrum, particularly if you are a childminder or someone who works in a small setting the design and delivery of a quality outdoor space may be down to one or perhaps two individuals.

Therefore the information presented is not intended to be viewed as a strict set of criteria. Rather, the information provided should be considered in line with your unique individual circumstances. **Space to Play** offers guiding good practice principles that have been derived from literature of good tried and tested practice. Drawing upon a wide range of research, and publicised documents the source material aims to inspire, innovate and offer creative ideas. Whether your outdoor space for play is in a childminders back garden or you have a dedicated play space in a full day care setting, the principles of good design should be the same. Providing beneficial and stimulating outdoor play experiences and opportunities for children should be intrinsic to a childcare settings overall offer.

Why was 'Space to Play' developed?

The Minimum Standards have a lot to say on the subject of play which receives sixty-two mentions in the policy document emphasising the importance of planning for and implementing play within settings. Despite its prevalence within the policy document there is little guidance offered on how settings can best plan, implement or measure the quality of outdoor play opportunities and experiences. In section three of the Minimum Standards - Quality of the Physical Environment outdoor play receives four distinct mentions:

“

“...the setting and its outside play area are secure and children are not left unsupervised” (p.20).

“

“Safety matting or soft surfacing is provided for equipment that requires children to climb. Soft surfacing is also provided for outdoor play involving elevated equipment” (p.40).

“

“Outdoor play space is safe, secure, well-maintained and exclusively for the use of the children when the setting is in operation. The safety and security of the play area is checked prior to use” (p.42).

“

“...Adverse weather is not necessarily a barrier to outdoor play” (p.42).

With a view of unpicking some of these issues and also assisting consistent compliance, in both the delivery and inspection process **Space To Play** guides the reader through the various stages of a design cycle.

Space To Play considers and supports implementation of outdoor play as identified and grouped in the Minimum Standards:

- Quality of Care
- Quality of Staffing, Management and Leadership
- Quality of the Physical Environment
- Quality of Monitoring and Evaluation
- Policies and Procedures