

# Play Matters

## Hanging Out - Older Children at Play



### Briefing Sheet 4

#### PLAY

Children have an innate urge to play from birth right through to teenage years. Freely chosen play (play which is directed by children) is critically important for all children as part of their everyday lives and access to quality, unstructured play is known to help improve children and young people's overall health, well-being and development.

#### PLAYING THROUGH CHILDHOOD

During the early years of children's lives parents are encouraged to play with their children; these early play experiences can help create a bond and attachment between parents and their children. Good play experiences will help children to develop many skills such as self-confidence, self-esteem, curiosity, independence, and resilience. These lifelong skills will be beneficial for children as they grow into young adults making their own way in the world.

As children grow older they may not call free activity as playing but might prefer for it to be called hanging out or chilling out. It is critically important that adults remember to allow children and young people the time and space to 'hang out or chill out'.

It is during pre-teen/teenage years that children and young people seek greater independence away from their parents/adults. Friends and friendship groups become very significant and healthy friendships are important. Often at this age young people will want to socialise and hang out in groups in neighbourhoods, parks or other public spaces. This however, can sometimes cause tension because, although they may look too old to be playing in traditional play areas, older children and teenagers do still need to play.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF PRE-TEEN / TEENAGERS

During pre-teen/teenage years young people are exploring their identity – they may experiment with fashion and hair styles and discover different types of music and creativity. They also at this stage have many decisions to make – how to

appear, who to identify with, who to befriend and who to be loyal to. Some characteristics can include:

**Socially:** they may be becoming more aware of how their own behaviour affects others – especially friendships; they may be concerned about how other people see them and peer pressure can have a significant influence; identity is becoming very important; they often want to spend more time with friends than family.

**Intellectually:** they can usually think logically, solving problems by working through them in their head (especially if it is something that they have experienced before); they can think much quicker now and thinking becomes much more sophisticated; they usually enjoy some form of responsibility; they can seem very grown up but also very childish at the same time.

**Emotionally:** emotionally it may be important to have friends of the same gender now; they are often more self-assured and independent – especially amongst friends; they can be competitive and sometimes argue with parents/adults; they can often be able to recognise emotions and are beginning to learn how to regulate them; they can have mood swings.

Online relationships are becoming integral to the lives of today's teenage children and social media will often help young people to stay in touch with friends, make plans with them, and feel connected. It is important that adults encourage appropriate behaviour which applies to both the online and offline worlds.

#### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people today are surrounded by an overload of technical things to do (computers, x-box, texting, phones, computers, gaming) which can encourage inactive or sedentary behaviour. It is important to remember that young people also need physical activity. Being physically active is essential for wellbeing and it is recommended that 5 to 18 year olds get at least 60 active minutes and up to several hours of activity every day. Physical activity can help develop co-ordination; maintain healthy weight;

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improve concentration and learning; strengthen muscles and bones; improve health and fitness; improve sleep; and build confidence and social skills. All of these will help towards good mental health and happiness.

With obesity levels increasing in Northern Ireland (we have the highest number of overweight or obese teenagers in the whole of the UK) encouraging children and young people to be physically active through play is critically important for their overall health and wellbeing. Physical activity can include

Playing - Skating - Climbing - Skipping - Jogging - Active Wii Games - Bike Ride - Sport - Skateboarding - Swimming - Dancing - Walking - Football - Being Outdoors!



## HANGING OUT FREE TIME - TIPS FOR PARENTS

The most important thing to remember is that children and young people need **TIME**, **SPACE** and **PERMISSION** to play, hang out, or chill out. As children get older **TIME** to chill and relax or hang out with friends becomes increasingly important as the time spent on schoolwork and/or structured activities increases.

Having permission to 'hang out' within neighbourhoods and communities is critically important! Parents, communities and neighbourhoods should encourage and be welcoming of young people.

It is okay for your child or young person to be bored sometimes! Being bored can help motivate them to find something creative or new to fill their time.

Children and teenagers use screens for schoolwork, communication and entertainment. Develop healthy screen time habits and limit daily screen time and use of technology (see Briefing Sheet 1 for tips and ideas).

Accept that your 'young person' might do things differently from you, acknowledge and respect their choices, follow their lead and allow them the opportunity and independence to choose for themselves.

## PLAYFUL IDEAS FOR CHILLING OUT WITH YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Encourage your young person to 'take time out' and 'when invited' join in or instigate some fun activities. Spending free time together is a great way to stay connected with your

teenage child. When you can, take direction from them but if you need some ideas you could try these activities:-

- Go on a walk or night-time hike or how about mountain biking?
- Have a movie night, choose a movie together and add some popcorn.
- Play a game of chess, dominoes, jacks or card games.
- Try a board game – they can be great fun!
- How about a dance mat or playing a wii game.
- Ping Pong, air hockey, tennis, darts, pool or snooker.
- Have a pamper night with facemasks, foot soaks and hand massages.
- If you have a 'gamer' in the house – play together. Teens find it hilarious to see how bad their parents are at gaming!
- Go outside – play some football, frisbee, dodgeball, piggy in the middle or stick in the mud. You'll be amazed at what fun can be had!
- Share some of your old traditional games – kerbsie, two-ball, german jumps, kick-the-can, skipping...
- Have a picnic, cook a meal together, or plan a BBQ. Sleep outside!
- Get to know your child's friends, welcome them into your home and allow them space to chill or hang out comfortably.
- Reflect back on your own teenage years from time to time ...remember your experiences and allow your child the playful opportunities that you had.



*My kids get great delight at making a fool out of me playing dance games on the Wii, we have such fun and its great exercise too!*

Michelle, mum of 14-year-old daughter

*We go down to the park on a Saturday afternoon just to kick a ball around. I'd actually forgotten how much fun running around playing footie in a park can be!*

Steve, dad of 13-year-old son

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