The Power of Play Workshop for Parents

November 2025

What is play?

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‘Play is **self-directed, freely chosen, and intrinsically motivated activity** in which children explore, experiment, imagine, and interact for the sheer joy of the experience rather than for an external goal or outcome.’

Raising the Nation Play Commission’s *Everything to Play For* (2025), defines play as ‘**a fundamental childhood need.’**

Decline in Play

- According to *Play England*'s 2022 Playday survey, only **27.4% of children** said they "regularly play out in their street." Play England

- For comparison, **80.4% of adults aged 55–64** (i.e. a previous generation) said they played out "regularly" in their street as children. Play England

- The report also noted a "steady decline in regular street play since the 1950s."

- The report also argues there is a "culture hostile to play," with factors such as "No Ball Games" signs, noise complaints, urban planning that restricts play spaces, and more.

- Play England's research also found a "steep drop-off" in opportunities for outdoor play as children move through primary school: in Key Stage 2, only ~10% of schools reported **daily outdoor play**.

The Anxious Generation – Dr Jonathan Haidt

“My central claim in this book is that these two trends - overprotection in the real world and underprotection in the virtual world - are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became the anxious generation.”

“Children need to swing and then jump off the swing. They need to explore forests and junkyards in search of novelty and adventure……..In the process they develop a broad set of competences, including the ability to judge risk for themselves, take appropriate action when faced with risks, and learn that when things go wrong, even if they get hurt, they can usually handle it without calling in an adult.”

“Our goal in designing the places children play, she says, should be to “keep them as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible.”

“children require exposure to setbacks, failures, shocks, and stumbles in order to develop strength and self-reliance. Overprotection interferes with this development and renders young people more likely to be fragile and fearful as adults.”

“Physical play, outdoors and with other children of mixed ages, is the healthiest, most natural, most beneficial sort of play. Play with some degree of physical risk is essential because it teaches children how to look after themselves and each other.”

“Like young trees exposed to wind, children who are routinely exposed to small risks grow up to become adults who can handle much larger risks without panicking. Conversely, children who are raised in a protected greenhouse sometimes become incapacitated by anxiety before they reach maturity.”

“Far more unsupervised play and childhood independence. That’s the way children naturally develop social skills, overcome anxiety, and become self-governing young adults.”

“When we give trust to kids, they soar. Trusting our kids to start venturing out into the world may be the most transformative thing adults can do.”

Everything to Play For
A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play
June 2025

'We now have the unhappiest children in Europe, with one in five suffering from a mental health problem, as well as growing levels of obesity among children in England. We also have record low levels of children arriving at school not 'school ready', and rising numbers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).'

'Risk is an important part of development. Risky play builds resilience, and can reduce anxiety. Evidence from countries like Finland shows that a balanced approach to risk - supported by safe public spaces and cultural norms - fosters independence and wellbeing.'

Research shows that play is one of the fundamental elements of childhood happiness.

Children who are not bored but have fun, engaging joyful playtimes enjoy coming to school more and learn better.

Neurological research has proven that play is the only activity which lights up every part of the brain.

Play increases the number of neural connections made in the brain leading to greater flexibility and developmental capacity.

Effectively addresses the crisis in lack of childhood movement and strength for all children.

Great daily play builds stronger muscles and bones, lung capacity, motor function and coordination and is essential for physical and emotional regulation.

Play allows children to practice and build skills in language, cooperation, and collaboration.

Play is also is the foundation of child friendships, and helps to develop and and strengthen them. All of these benefits will translate into the classroom.

Papaya

‘Free play is practicing for adulthood.’

‘In play, children enter a flow state which is degenerative.’

‘Childhood is learning to take risks with limited consequences.’

‘Mistakes in childhood protect us in adulthood, but mistakes online are different – the leave a digital tattoo.’

‘Resilience can only be learnt through adversity.’

Papaya cont….

‘Let them try and fail. Show them love and empathy but let them get themselves back up.’

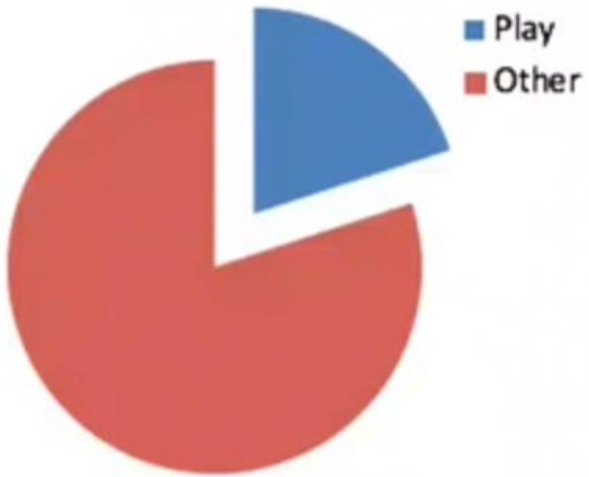
‘Teenagers need strong roots to survive but these are grown in earlier childhood.’

Frozen story….

University research…..

Between the 2016/17 and 2022/23 academic years, the share of undergraduate students at universities across the UK who said they had experienced mental health difficulties rose from 6% to 16%, meaning around one in six now report such challenges.

Play makes up 20% of school life



Per year
231 hours
37 days
7.4 weeks

Primary years
1.4 years

Impact of Outdoor Play in the UK

- More varied play behaviours, with wider and more creative use of space, time, and materials.
- A reduction in disruptive behaviour: children showed “greater enjoyment” during playtimes, and staff perceived fewer behaviour problems.
- Positive changes in school culture: more trust with children, a more risk-positive attitude, and a strategic, values-based approach to play.
- Improved social development, imagination, collaboration, and self-regulation.
- Increased physical activity: children are more active, including groups who are typically less “sporty.”
- Better risk management: children learn to assess and take risks, rather than avoid them.
- Mental wellbeing: schools report that children are happier, more self-regulated, and that well-being improves.
- Fewer accidents: schools report up to **80% fewer reported playtime accidents**.
- Time savings for senior leadership: large drop (reportedly up to 90%) in time spent resolving playtime conflicts.
- More effective use of school grounds: schools redesign or repurpose their grounds (including “loose parts,” more natural play materials) to support richer play.

‘As safe as necessary, not as safe as possible.’

Risks of ‘Risk-free’ play

- Scared to try
- All work and no play
- Boredom
- Listless, no learning
- Lack of control
- Unprepared for life … now and in the future
- Incompetence

Benefits of Risk In Play

- Reduces risk of obesity
- Improves physical health and development, gross and fine motor skills
- Resilience and capacity
- Social skills
- Feelings of achievement, development of self-esteem, sense of self

Our Journey so far……

Aims: Provide range of play opportunities, make use of all areas of our school grounds, reduce rules, give children choice, teach children to manage risk.

- INSET in July to review zones and develop plans
- First zones in place for September
- Rules established: ‘Am I safe? Are my friends safe? Am I respecting the equipment?’
- Training for all staff - importance of dynamic risk assessment, encouraging the children to self-regulate play based on simple, easy to remember rules.

Safety

- Risk-Benefit assessment developed and staff trained in effective supervision based on this.

Dynamic risk management

All staff in the playground should be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action if they think that the risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity of harm while preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible. Dynamic risk management in play work requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. The quality of play will suffer if the adult's attitude is one of hovering, anxious over-attention. There should be an assumption that most play is not dangerous and that children can develop a high degree of competence, given practice, over time. However, staff should also be vigilant, and they should be aware of the kinds of play and resources being used in their patch, who is playing and what the likely risks are. They should be observant, mobile and attentive at all times. Most of the time they will not need to intervene but should be ready to:

● *stop the activity or manage the risk if staff think that serious harm is imminent or probable.*

● *remain vigilant and consider negotiating how to manage the risk with the children if they think that serious harm is possible but not probable.*

● *continue mobile supervision if serious harm is very unlikely.*

Last week – one accident recorded in Accident record where a child tripped, fell and banged their head. This week - no accidents recorded.

Current position:

Zones already in place:

- Den building
- Large-scale construction
- Wheeled vehicles – including boards and buggies
- Tyre swing
- Mud kitchen
- Dressing up
- Small house and babies
- Dinosaur world

All this is in addition to our existing play spaces: adventure playground, Astro (for team games, skipping, spinners, bouncers etc, library, spiritual garden, willow dome.

Next steps:

- Large sand pit to replace one of the planters.
- Ongoing review of smaller scale resources.
- Area down the side of the library.

- Working with staff and the school council to review and develop based on feedback from the children and observation.

The children do and will get muddy – wellie essential, overalls, waterproof trousers, spare socks.

Frostfield C of E Primary School
COURAGE
LOVE
RESPECT

1.Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation* (2025)
“Children need time to play freely. Through unstructured play, they learn to manage risk, navigate social challenges, and build the resilience they will need as adults.”

2.Raising the Nation Play Commission, *Everything to Play For* (2025)
“Play is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It equips children with the confidence, creativity, and social skills to thrive now and in the future.”

3.Peter Gray, *Free to Learn* (2013)
“Play is the work of childhood. In play, children practice adult skills: problem-solving, cooperation, and self-regulation, preparing them for life beyond school.”

Any questions?

Come to the Edge (Christopher Logue)

Come to the edge.
We might fall.
Come to the edge.
It's too high!
COME TO THE EDGE!
And they came,
And he pushed,
And they flew.