

West Lothian Play Strategy



**Our children have the best start in life
and are ready to succeed**

**West Lothian is a place where play is valued as
an essential, life enhancing daily experience for
all our children and young people**

What is Play?

Play is fundamental and essential for human development. Play is how children learn.



“Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated controlled and structured by children themselves. Play is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than a means to an end. It may take infinite forms but the key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non - productivity.”

United Nations General Comment 17.

Through play children learn about life and the world around them.



Foreword

I am delighted to introduce West Lothian's Play Strategy. The vision that 'West Lothian is a place where play is valued as an essential, life enhancing daily

experience for all our children and young people' is an ambitious, however achievable goal for all our children and young people. Play is fundamental to children's enjoyment of childhood and the key to how they learn about the world around them. Children learn how to learn through play and develop the skills required throughout life.

In West Lothian we are committed to work across all areas in the Community Planning Partnership to deliver the best play opportunities we can for all our children and young people.

In developing this strategy, we are prioritising children's needs to make sure that children and young people can play freely in a variety of ways and achieve their full potential.

In West Lothian we value play and the benefits it brings to the individual and the community as a whole. For children and young people to flourish they need the time and space to play freely.

Councillor Cathy Muldoon

Depute Leader of West Lothian Council

Introduction

Scotland has a National Play Strategy and Action Plan and supporting documents such as the Play Map to guide all sectors in delivering and valuing play. In West Lothian we recognise that every child has the right to play and have access to a variety of play opportunities.

Good play experiences have value not just for children and young people but also for the wider community both now and into the future. Play is vital to the health and wellbeing of our children and young people.

Play contributes to the

- **Intellectual**
- **physical**
- **social**
- **emotional and**
- **creative**
- **development of children.**

If we get play right, we will foster

- **successful learners**
- **confident individuals**
- **effective contributors**
- **responsible citizens**

The skills learned through the opportunity to play equip children with transferable skills to serve them in later life. Therefore children and young people's need to play, in the broadest sense, should be considered in all Council services and decisions and across the West Lothian Community Planning Partners.

West Lothian has been supporting good quality, accessible play provision for many years. Investment has been made in new and replacement play areas, and broader use of parks and green spaces. West Lothian has a variety of play spaces available with safe routes to travel. It also has nationally recognised, award winning high quality play provision, along with established training within the private and third sector.

However with the introduction of West Lothian's Play Strategy

- We aim to improve and widen quality play opportunities for all our children and young people
- We aim to establish links between local and National policies relating to play and take action within each service, responsible for children young people and their families.





The rights of the child

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 31 (leisure, play and culture): Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.

Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child): When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

Article 15 (Freedom of association): Children have the right to meet together and join groups and organisations.

Getting it Right for Every Child

Wellbeing indicators for play:



Our commitment to play in West Lothian

We will prioritise:

Time to Play

For children, playing and spending time with friends is top of the list of priorities, however as adults we do not always allow time to play. It is a concern that children and young people are spending less time outdoors and in free play whilst priority is given to structured/supervised activities. In West Lothian we will promote time to play.



Space to Play

Children and young people use a number of staffed/unstaffed, indoor/outdoor play spaces. These may include streets, public parks, play-parks, gardens, urban spaces, school, woodland, playgrounds, car parks, lanes, leisure centres, community centres, soft play provision and homes. In West Lothian we will ensure that community play spaces are sufficient, challenging and accessible to all.

Attitude to play

Our attitudes to play are formed from our own experiences of play and other influencing factors in society. These may include real perceived risks - antisocial behaviour, bullying, child protection, fear of strangers, danger of cars on the road.

To allow children and young people the freedom to play there needs to be a shift in attitude to the perceived risks around play in our communities. When adults place value on play, children and young people will have better opportunities to play.

We aim towards a shift in attitude towards playing outdoors. The weather should not be a barrier to play, we just need to ensure appropriate clothing is available.

Manage risk

We aim to increase acceptance and increase knowledge to reduce the fear of risk in play. Child's safety can be a concern for any parent/professional. Play is a great way for children to learn from a young age what their limits are by assessing the situation. Allowing children to take and manage risk has beneficial outcomes: it prepares them for being more independent and gives confidence as they grow older. When adults see the benefits of play outweigh the risk, richer play opportunities will follow.

Role of adults in play

Are adults being

- Over-protective?
- Insistent on everything being educational or structured?
- Too worried about children taking some risks?
- Over-concerned about getting clothes dirty?

Benefits of play

The main benefits of play are that having fun in your own way leads to a feeling of being relaxed and happy. Through having fun, children and young people are more active, sociable and have the opportunity to be creative and use their imaginations. The benefits of play increase with playing outdoors with access to nature.

Social

Play develops social skills by learning to co-operate with other. It also aids the development of collaborative skills, conflict resolution and taking turns.

Physical

Play is one of the ways to improve gross motor skills as well as fine motor skills. Weight-bearing active play can reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis and help maintain a healthy weight. Spending more time playing outside and less time indoors on screens, enhances mood and can make you feel good.

Intellectual

Play provides a meaningful context for children to learn and physically active children learn better. Play makes learning fun and enjoyable; encourages children to explore and discover together and on their own; allows children to extend what they are learning; encourages children to experiment and take risks; provides opportunities for collaborative learning with adults and peers; allows children to practice skills.

Creative

Play gives the opportunity for abstract thinking, using imagination, problem-solving, social cognition,, perspective-taking, mastering new concepts

Emotional

Play is good for self-confidence, self-esteem, anxiety reduction, developing empathy with others and therapeutic effects in understanding yourself and the world around.

Objectives

In West Lothian we want all children and young people to have quality play experiences as part of their daily lives. The attached Action Plan for play in West Lothian sets out how we will achieve these outcomes.

In the home

Our homes and family environments are places where children and young people, including those with a disability, can enjoy plentiful play opportunities appropriate to their age, developmental stage, need and preference.

At nursery/school

Children and young people, including those with a disability, enjoy high quality play opportunities, particularly outdoor free play in stimulating spaces with access to nature, on a daily basis.

In the community

Children and young people, including those with a disability, have sufficient time and space (physical and social) for playing within their community and play is valued, encouraged and supported in communities.

Positive support for play

West Lothian provides a positive environment for play through: a professional workforce, infrastructure and strong visionary leadership, a well-resourced third sector and a supportive and informed media.

Training for play

A suite of bespoke training opportunities and information will be developed for a wide range of staff and volunteers.



Play is good for you and very fun. Chloe, age 9.

I like to play because it makes my imagination grow. Ethan, age 10.

Playing is freedom. I love playing !!! Olivia, age 9.

Playing is important for health and imagination. Nikola, age 9.

Play makes me think of den building, shaking sand and climbing the trees in the woodland. Libby Age 9

Nothing is better than playing. Lucy Age 9

Playing is a good way to express yourself. It makes people happy and its inspiring when you are writing stories. You can play anything you can imagine. You can role play, take part in games and many more. If you're ever bored you should play something. Nicola Age 10

West Lothian Play Strategy

The Play Strategy was developed in consultation with children, young people and parents in West Lothian, and partners from the Health Improvement Team (HIT), Family and Community Development West Lothian (FCDWL), NHS Lothian, Sure Start and Education.