

The Importance of *Play*



Play allows children to experience fun, joy and laughter in a way that is important to them. It's also where they develop and practice life skills.

The positive benefits of play include:

- being physically active in a fun way that develops fundamental movement skills
- encouraging self-directed creativity and innovation
- improving social and emotional connection
- improving a young person's understanding of their relationship with the physical environment
- improving resilience, independence and leadership by determining their own outcomes
- aiding better decision-making based around elements of challenge and risk.

Children have a right to play

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), ratified by New Zealand in 1993, defines universal principles and standards for the status and treatment of children worldwide. Article 31 of UNCROC affirms children's right to play.

The Ministry of Health's physical activity guidelines for children and young people (aged 5 to 17) and for under-fives recognise the importance of play in ensuring young people are active and helping them develop socially, emotionally and cognitively.

What is play?

Play is:

- intrinsically motivated – it is spontaneous and will happen anywhere
- personally directed – it has limited or no adult involvement
- freely chosen – it is self-determined and has no pre-determined outcome
- fun, accessible, challenging, social and repeatable.



Play in New Zealand is under threat

Children need time, space and permission to play. However, many Kiwi kids aren't having the same playful upbringing enjoyed by previous generations. As with many nations, there are a number of reasons for this, including:

Time: young people's lives are increasingly structured, reducing the free time in which to play.

Space: changes to both the built and natural environments have changed access to traditional play spaces (for example, streets and driveways are no longer considered play spaces).

Health and safety: parental and societal perceptions of young people's safety have changed when and where children can play.

Societal changes: a need for instant satisfaction is challenging the journey of discovery learning through play.

Technology: increases in screen time and the ability to live life in a 'virtual world' are removing young people from real life cause and effect.

Adult awareness: parents lack understanding of their role in play as enablers – quality play experience involves limited adult input.

Sport NZ's principles of *Play*

Like other parts of the sport and active recreation, government and private sectors, Sport NZ has a role in making sure that opportunities for our kids to play are preserved, enhanced and relevant to the world we live in today. We have developed the following set of play principles to help guide our work in partnering and collaborating with others interested in play, and to advocate on the importance of play for young New Zealanders.

1 Play is important to the wellbeing of young New Zealanders

- It is vital in ensuring young people have the best possible start in life and develop a lifelong love of community sport and being physically active.

2 Play is a cornerstone of our Physical Literacy Approach

- Play is a crucial part of physical, cognitive, social/emotional and spiritual development for young people.

3 Play is the shared responsibility of everyone

- It needs clear and strong leadership from those who can enable play. This includes the views and opinions of young people.
- It is equally important in the settings of home, school and community.

4 Young people must have access to enriched and varied playful experiences within their local environments

- A variety of play types
- As an individual and with others
- Space and place – man-made and natural
- Sensory rich
- A sense of an escape from realism
- Physical movement

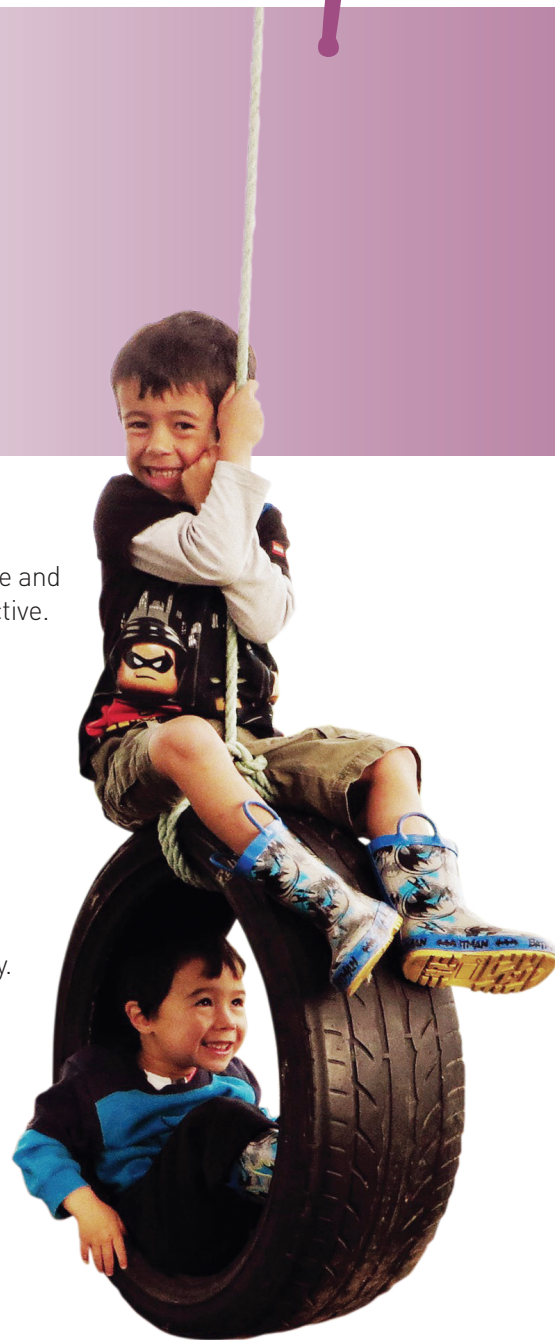
5 Adults must understand what their role is in enabling play

- Quality play experience involves limited adult input.

6 Young people need the opportunity to experience risk and challenge through play

- The provision of opportunities for all children to encounter or create uncertainty, unpredictability and potential risks (including physical, cognitive, social/emotional and spiritual) as part of their play.
- We do not mean putting children in danger of serious harm.

7 Wherever possible, play should include the opportunity to be active.



Play – the foundation of physical literacy

Play is at the heart of Sport NZ's Physical Literacy Approach, and is an integral part of our Community Sport Strategy and Young People Plan.

Each person has their own level of motivation, confidence, physical competence, and knowledge and understanding that affects how they value and choose to be physically active. We call this **physical literacy**.

A person's physical literacy evolves throughout their life. For young people who are building and developing their physical literacy, quality play experiences that meet their holistic needs are vital.



To find out more about supporting young people to enjoy and develop a lifelong love of physical activity visit sportnz.org.nz/youngpeople.