

Encouraging Play

There are numerous things that will help to create spaces in which children want to play, and parents feel are safe from stranger danger. There is a list below of some examples of ways to provide play opportunities, which you may want to consider before deciding how to design your street.

Simply by slowing down traffic the street is made safer for children to cycle, rollerblade or even skip down the road all of which they see more as play than as exercise or a form of transport. Designing play opportunities into the street will not only make the street more child-friendly and provide much-needed space for play, but will also help to develop a positive attitude towards play in the street. As well as getting the physical environment right for children, attitudes need to change to counteract the 'no ball games' culture which has developed in many areas, if children are to make the most of their streets for play.



Play within a residential street can take a huge variety of forms. More formal play, for



example, may involve installing fixed play equipment (for example climbing structures, swings or a basket ball hoop). This is only likely to be possible in a street with considerable space, for example grass verges or an unused plot of land.

More informal play can occur without fixed play equipment through developing spaces which appeal to children and lend themselves to creative play interpretations. The design of a street might provide spaces where children can build dens, chalk on the pavement and play games such as tag and hop scotch.

Some features of a DIY Street intended to calm traffic (e.g. boulders) can also help children to play. Children are incredibly creative and the play potential of a street is endless, if there is a welcoming environment and the permission to use the space.

❖ **Examples of street design features which can encourage play**

- ❖ Street furniture such as seating or bollards (and even planters) offer children opportunities for climbing, balancing and jumping off.
- ❖ Planting schemes allow children to explore the nature on their doorstep and to learn about the natural world. Consider choosing plants which are easy to maintain, those which attract wildlife, change with the seasons and are quite resilient.
- ❖ Artworks can provide exciting play features.
- ❖ Also consider existing features the street may already have, which offer play opportunities
- ❖ Are there trees which are suitable for climbing?
- ❖ Rainwater - children love to splash in puddles and streams created by the rain. Small puddles will evaporate or be dispersed through play and if the surface allows larger puddles to drain away over time then they will not become stagnant. Streets in which rainwater runs along in a stream, before reaching the drain, provide good water play features.
- ❖ Existing green spaces and grass verges can provide excellent spaces for play and can be developed as 'pocket parks'. Patterns created by surfacing – even the lines between paving stones – provide children with opportunities for creating games.



Top tips

Get children involved in the design process by holding some fun play design days.

Close the street for the day and use chalk or straw bales to mark out with the children where a play space might work. Hold some discussions with them to get a flavour of what they'd like to do in the space/street and how best this can be achieved – but be aware that children may not suggest natural play features, since they are more likely to think of swings and slides as “play” equipment

Have a think about the things listed and then consider:

- ❖ What approach is appropriate for your street – simply making the street safer for children’s travel and play, or adding features to make the street more playable?
- ❖ What age range are you hoping to accommodate?
- ❖ Is there space within your street to create a designated ‘play space’?
- ❖ Would you like to use formal or informal play design?
- ❖ What’s your budget?
- ❖ Can the ‘play area/space’ be viewed by all properties?
- ❖ Is the street well lit?
- ❖ Is there space for a bench near the ‘play area’ for parents or elderly to rest on?

❖ **Other points to consider**

Will you need planning permission – if you decide that you would like to build in some play equipment ring your council planning office to ask their advice about planning permission.

- ❖ Can your play element be made accessible/usable for the disabled? (For more on this see *Inclusive Design for Play*, KIDS, 2009)
- ❖ For all play equipment, you need to carry out a risk assessment - see Play England *Managing Risk in Play Provision* for detailed advice
- ❖ Think about the maintenance of the play features and who would do it.