Play

Bolton

What is play?



Play is a **fundamental human right** for children & young people **up to age 18**[1]



Play is defined as[2]:

- 'a behaviour, activity or process **initiated, controlled & structured by children**. Play **takes place whenever & wherever** opportunities arise.'



Play is **different from sport**[3]

The characteristics of play are[2]:



- fun
- uncertainty
- challenge
- flexibility
- non-productivity
- **Together** these factors contribute to **making it enjoyable**



Teenagers play too[4]

- It may be called 'hanging out with friends', but still shares many of the characteristics of play.

Places to play



Play in all settings is important for children[5]

- being able to play **outdoors** is particularly important



Children can play anywhere, if the conditions allow[5]

- **Formal play spaces** – dedicated to play (e.g. playgrounds)
- **Informal play spaces** – all other spaces, where children and play must co-exist alongside the space's other users



Bolton has **86 parks & play areas**[6]

- 46.0/ 100,000 people
- GM average: 52.4/ 100,000 people



Opportunities for play can be supported or restricted by[7]:

- **Time**: the demands on children's time & how it is structured
- **Space**: the amount, design & management of space where children might play
- **Permission**: fear, expectations, tolerance, & the way adults view childhood & play.

Play for all ages



A **playful mindset** has **no age restrictions**[8]

- Play helps develop skills for creative problem solving & resilience
- A playful mindset encourages learning new content & skills
- Playful people are open to new experiences & surprises
- Playful adults are often more active



Elements such as **street furniture, public artworks, play equipment** can help create playful experiences by[8]:

- engaging people with their meanings
- expanding possible uses of spaces,
- creating different atmospheres



Residual spaces (often small & awkwardly shaped) can have playful elements added such as interactive art works[8]

- This may **reduce negative uses** such as fly-tipping or illegal parking
- This is most likely if it becomes an attractive location to play, relax & meet

Child friendly towns



Young people's **ability & freedom to get around** varies, but tends to grow with age[5].

- We need to consider how individual spaces come together to form **playful neighbourhoods**
- These are safer & more inclusive for all young people.



Children are around **age 11** when they are **allowed out to play unsupervised**[4]

- their **parents'** generation were allowed out at **around age 9**



Play is a vital part of **child friendly urban design** principles[9]:

- **Active travel & safety features** – so streets are safe & accessible for walking, cycling & wheeling.
- **Nature**: integrating green spaces & natural features that promote wellbeing.
- **Places to be, meet others & play**: environments that encourage play, meeting, & social engagement.

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Street play



Street play has seen a **steady decline** since the 1950s[10]

- **80%** of adults **aged 55 -64** years say that they regularly played out as children.
- **27%** of **children in 2022** said they that regularly play out in their street.



Children often reported being asked to **stop**[10]

- Making **noise** outside
- Playing **ball games**



Street & local play is important for children[10]

- It's **close to home** so cheap & accessible·
- Children & parents connect with others in their local area, **building community**
- It gives children **independence** younger who can't travel longer distances without an adult.



Play streets are a way parents & communities can give children space to play out in areas where it's no longer typical[11]

Inclusive play



Families in poverty & ethnic minority families are less likely to have access to **private gardens**[5]

- **Public play places** are even more important for these children.



Skateparks, BMX tracks, & Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs) make up 94% of facilities provided **'for teenagers'** in parks, but are often dominated by boys[5]

- Teenage girls particularly liked social swings[12]
- Mixed use spaces & play/ adventure equipment (e.g. trampolines) designed for teens was popular with boys & girls[13, 14]



Nearly ¾ of playgrounds are places where it would be **difficult for disabled & non-disabled children to play together**[8]



A **rich mix of play opportunities** can support inclusive play[15]

- E.g. materials & activities to explore all the senses - interesting textures, shapes, weight, pattern, colour, temperature

References

July 2026

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