Outdoor Play and Learning
Play Policy



The Stour Federation

Date of publication: October 2026 Review date: October 2029

1. COMMITMENT

The Stour Federation undertakes to refer to this Outdoor Play and Learning Policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our Academy Trust is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

2. RATIONALE

Our schools believe that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

The OPAL Primary Programme rationale is that "… better, more active and creative playtimes can mean happier and healthier children, and having happier, healthier, more active children usually results in a more positive attitude to learning in school, with more effective classroom lessons, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary behavioural problems, fewer playtime accidents, happier staff and a healthier attitude to life."

The OPAL Primary Programme aligns with each of our Trust RESPECT values. By encouraging outdoor play and learning, OPAL fosters strong relationships between children and their peers, as they collaborate and problem-solve together. It provides opportunities for children to excel in areas like physical skills, creativity, and social-emotional development. Through engaging in outdoor activities, children learn to serve their community by caring for the environment and developing a sense of responsibility. OPAL ignites passion for learning and exploration, encouraging children to embrace challenges and discover their own interests. By respecting nature and the rights of others, children demonstrate ethics in action. The collaborative nature of outdoor play encourages teamwork and collaboration amongst children and staff. Finally, the trusting environment created by OPAL allows children to feel safe and secure to take risks, explore their boundaries, and develop a deep trust in themselves and those around them.



Our positive and safe environments encourage pupils to be adventurous and take risks, secure in the knowledge that we will support them. By allowing pupils to learn from mistakes as well as achievements they strengthen their independence, resilience, confidence and determination.

3. DEFINITION AND VALUE OF PLAY

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

We believe play has many benefits, including:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- Play enhances children's self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions, within peer groups, with individuals, and within groups of different ages, abilities, interests, genders, ethnicities and cultures.
- Play requires ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- Play enables children to experience a wide range of emotions and develop their ability to cope with these, including sadness and happiness, rejection and acceptance, frustration and achievement, boredom and fascination, fear and confidence.
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

In The Stour Federation, we wholeheartedly believe in the power of play as a cornerstone of learning. Aligned with our Trust's vision of 'Learn, grow, succeed together', play provides the ideal environment for children to develop crucial life skills. Through play, children learn to negotiate, compromise, and collaborate, fostering essential leadership qualities. They develop resilience, creativity, and problem-solving abilities - all vital for success in school and beyond.

As author of *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt emphasises a play-based childhood is crucial for nurturing well-rounded individuals. Unlike a phone-based childhood, play encourages social interaction, emotional intelligence, and a deep understanding of the world around them. Haidt argues that a play-based childhood fosters crucial social, emotional, and cognitive development. Unstructured play allows children to develop creativity, problem-solving skills, and resilience. It encourages social interaction, empathy, and collaboration. In contrast, a phone-based childhood can lead to social isolation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and addiction. Excessive screen time can hinder the development of essential social skills, emotional intelligence, and physical health.

Risk = the ability to move beyond what is already known and already easily accomplished. Resilient learners overcome the risk of failure, pain and uncertainty.

There are 16 play types:



16 Play Types

Symbolic Play
Using objects, or actions to represent other objects, actions, or ideas, e.g. using a cardboard tube like a telescope.

Rough and Tumble Play
Discovering physical flexibility, generally friendly and positive.

Socio-Dramatic Play
When children act out experiences, e.g. playing house

Creative Play
Allows children to explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination.

Social Play
Any social situation where it's expected that everyone will follow the set rules - like during a game

Communication Play
Play using words, gestures e.g. charades, telling jokes, play acting, etc.

Dramatic Play
Play where children figure out roles to play, assign them and then act them out.

Locomotor Play
Movement for movement's sake, just because it's fun. Things like chase, tag, hide and seek and tree climbing

Imaginative Play
play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply, like imagining you are a bee, or pretending you have wings.

Exploratory Play
using senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them

Fantasy Play
child's imagination gets to run wild and they get to play out things that are that are unlikely to occur, like being a pilot or driving a car.

Deep Play
Play which allows the child to encounter risky experiences and conquer fear like heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies

Mastery Play
control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments, like digging holes or constructing shelters.

Object Play
play which uses sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements, like using a paintbrush.

Role Play
play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense nature, like brushing with a broom, dialing with a telephone..

Recapitulative Play
play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness.

Infographic created by www.encourageplay.com,

Play Type Information from Hughes, B. (2002) A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types, 2nd edition, London:

4. AIMS

Play makes up 20% of school life and 1.4 years out of a child's primary school career.

In relation to play, our Trust aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- Allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.

5. RIGHTS

The Stour Federation recognises the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the right to play, recreation and leisure (Article 31) and the right of children to be listened to on matters important to them (Article 12). We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

6. BENEFIT AND RISK

'Play is great for children's wellbeing and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.'

Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012)

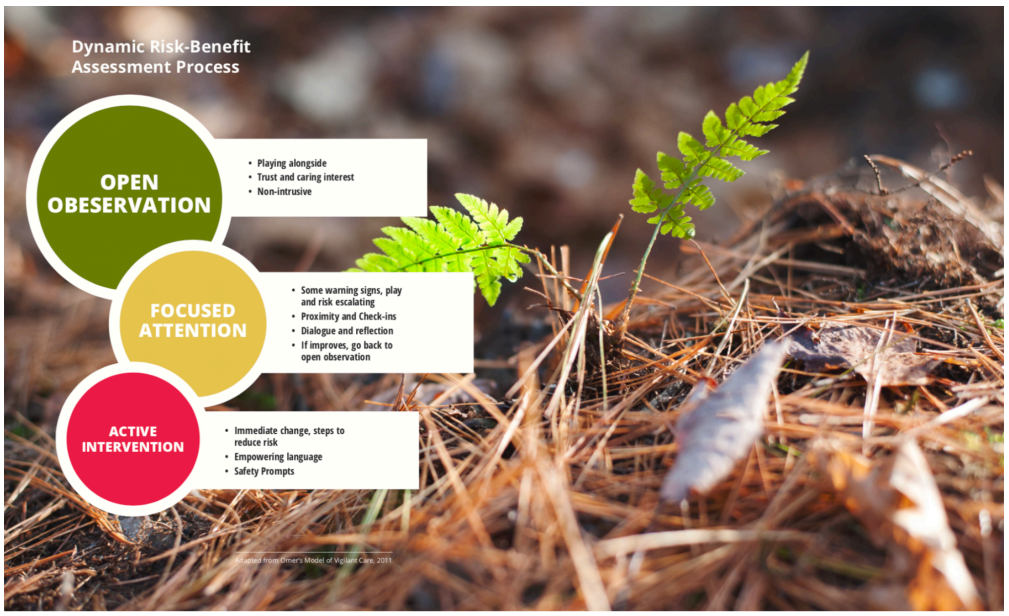
The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach (September 2012) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, the school will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. As outlined in the play sector publication 'Best Play', play provision should aim to 'manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children and young people safe from harm'.

In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments each school will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

7. SUPERVISION

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adults present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in Reception, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

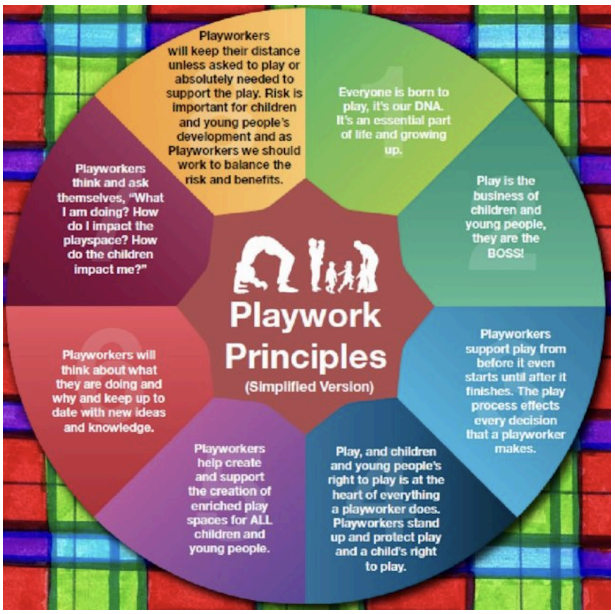


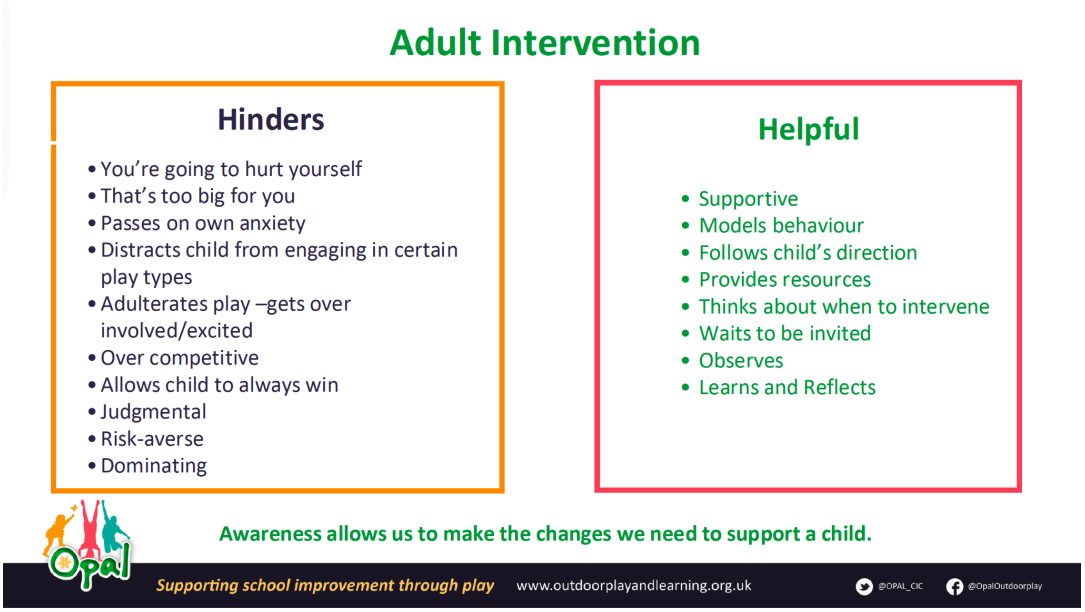
Individual schools produce their own guidelines for supervision of the playscapes, e.g. rotas, zones.

8. THE ADULT'S ROLE IN PLAY

The school will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.

The playworker's core function is to create an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced playworker is capable of enriching the child's play experience both in terms of the design and resources of the physical environment and in terms of the attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. Playworkers are a channel of access to new materials and tools and they can act as a stimulus to children to explore and learn. They are also available to participate in the play if invited.





9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs, we will ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

10. ENVIRONMENT

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance

play. We will use the document ‘Best Play’ to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

11. PLAY AND WEATHER

We operate a 'no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing' approach, embedding all-weather outdoor play every day to ensure children access rich, high-quality play experiences year-round, reserving indoor wet play times strictly for rare instances of extreme or unsafe weather.

Our school uniform lists outline that children should have wellies in school. It is also recommended, through our induction materials and newsletters, that children bring their own waterproof trousers or suits. Schools hold a bank of spares for anyone who needs them.