



## 12 PLAY AND ASN

All children have a right to play and some children may have additional needs to help them get the most out of their education, which includes their right to play. These needs might be triggered by changes in family life such as the arrival of a new baby, or it could be they have a long-term learning difficulty or disability.

The role of the adult is to ensure equitable access to play. This means giving children the time and place to play in a way which supports their ability to play freely with their own areas of interests and needs.

### Barriers to play

There are a range of barriers to children with additional needs experiencing rich play environments, from the simple absence of accessible play spaces for all children, or to attitudes towards disability affecting adults' ability to ensure equal access to play experiences.

Sometimes adults worry that they need specialised equipment or training, while often small changes to an environment might be all that is needed to benefit all children. There can be occasions where children with additional needs are overprotected; adventure, risk and challenge are part of play, and a right for all children.

### Thinking about disability

The social model of disability argues that the way society is organised reduces and limits life choices for people with disabilities. The medical perspective emphasises impairment or difference, focusing on the individual's failure to fit in to how society is organised. Taking a social model approach to play means thinking about the range of ways an environment might be enriched or made flexible in order to make it accessible and enjoyable for children with a range of disabilities or additional support needs alongside other children.

### Smart Play Network Members Support

As a member you have access to telephone and email support. For more information about the topics covered in this guidance sheet, or any other queries you may have about your project, please contact us using: 0131 554 2620 or [admin@smartplaynetwork.org](mailto:admin@smartplaynetwork.org)

### Creating a flexible and rich environment

The theory of loose parts play is that the degree of creativity and inventiveness is directly proportional to the number of variables in it.

This idea is taken further by Fraser Brown (2003) who proposed that in a rich and flexible environment children become even more flexible and creative in how they use their rich play space. In this cycle, the more varied and flexible the environment the more scope children have for exploring their interests and meeting their own needs, sometimes with adult support. This might mean more time to explore and interact with an environment in ways that an adult might miss without close attention.

### Some examples

- A child who wants to be quiet and on their own might benefit from dens and quiet spaces where they can play or retreat to by themselves.
- A child that enjoys ordering and arranging their environment might enjoy arranging pine cones, leaves, pebbles, flowers, shells or feathers. These provide a greater range of sensory experiences for a child to explore than using plastic bricks or toy cars.
- A child with a sensory impairment might enjoy the contrasts of light, shade, colour and sound created by natural features such as trees and plants, but also by different textures of fabric hung or draped.
- Weather brings loose parts to which children can use their bodies to interact – holding their tongues out, throwing back their head to react to the way the wind blows your hair.
- A child using a wheelchair might not often experience a bumpy surface and might enjoy a sense of risky unexpected surfaces.

### Further Reading

Scotland's Play Strategy - Playing with quality and equality - a review of inclusive play in Scotland:  
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/10/1795>

Sensory Play Toolkit:  
<https://sensoryplaytoolkit.weebly.com/>