

Why play is important

At a time when significant efficiency savings are needing to be found across the Local Authority, all service areas are being challenged and questioned and are required to justify ongoing funding. This Briefing Paper gives rationale for why play is important to children and why continued investment is essential.

Children's play cannot be underestimated – through play children are developing crucial life skills, play contributes to children's social, physical, intellectual and emotional/mental health.

Social: Increases empathy, compassion, sharing; improves non-verbal skills and increases attention and attachment.

Physical: Increases a range of skills (agility, co-ordination, balance, flexibility, fine and gross motor skills). Children's sedentary lifestyle and lack of access to play opportunities is contributing to the alarming rise in childhood obesity, with 26.2% of 4-5 year olds in Carmarthenshire being overweight or obese. Disabled children in particular face barriers when trying to access play opportunities.

Intellectual: Play has positive effects on the brain and on a child's ability to learn. Contributes towards creativity, abstract thinking, imagination, problem solving, empathy, perspective taking and mastering new concepts

Emotional/Mental Health: Creates fun, enjoyment, love for life, release of energy, tension reduction. Research shows that good quality play experiences help improve children's mental health. The Mental Health Foundation reported that limited opportunities for children to play outside, or to attend supervised play projects, was a causative factor in the rise in mental ill health in children and young people. Over the last 4 years, the number of children referred to mental health services across Wales has more than doubled

Child Poverty: High quality and accessible play opportunities help reduce the effects of poverty on the lives of children and young people and is also a means of reducing the inequalities between children living in families that can afford costly play activities and those that cannot and therefore reducing poverty of experience for all children. In its Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2011), the Welsh Government recognises the right to play and its contribution to children's development and resilience. The strategy places emphasis on play as being essential element in children's development and can provide strong protective factor in children's lives. Play can shield children from the negative effects of poverty and allow children to develop their resilience to difficulties and uncertainties in their lives.

Play for children is a fundamental right and an intrinsic part of their childhood. As decision makers we have a duty to address this fundamental right by ensuring the provision of accessible and inclusive play opportunities for all children within Carmarthenshire.