



# Wolston St Margaret's C of E Primary School

LEARNING, BELIEVING AND ACHIEVING TOGETHER TO  
'LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE'

*MATTHEW 5:16*

## Outdoor Play and Learning Policy November 2025

Our Christian vision shapes all that we do: Learning, Believing, and Achieving together to  
"Let your Light Shine" (Matthew 5:16).

Guided by our Christian values of **Honesty, Love, Courage and Community**, we encourage all to flourish. Like a lamp set high to light its surroundings, everyone — whether timid or outgoing — is called to share their light for all to see. Our vision welcomes children and adults of all faiths and none, inspiring them to live, grow, and learn together, showing the world their unique light.

## 1 Summary

1. Our setting recognises that play (especially outdoor play) is at the heart of healthy, full development for children.
2. We recognise that in order to learn, children must push the boundaries of what is already known and already easily accomplished and this requires children to experience risk and challenge.
3. In our desire to do our best for all children in our care we are dedicated to providing a rich play setting where 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.
4. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach to manage our duty of care to protect and our duty of care to provide for children's needs.

**Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'**

**'Health and Safety Executive (HSE) fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential dangers'. (HSE, 2013)**

*'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 (2012)

## 2 Commitment

Wolston St Margaret's Primary School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. At Wolston St Margaret's, we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. We believe play has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

## 3 Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, improved technology, fewer areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play deprivation' for many of today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and

learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development which is vital for all our children and in particular for EAL learners and those children with deprived speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment.

Our school believes 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.

We surveyed the children in June 2024 for their views on play time. They highlighted the need for improvement in different areas. Many were positive about their play times, but many children's comments included; *'different adults say different things about what we are allowed to do'*, *'there are places we want to play but cannot'*, *'there's not enough to do'*, *'we can't use the field for most of the year'*, *'we don't get to go in the garden or woodland area'*, *'we don't get long enough to play'* and *'we want more resources'*.

We also surveyed our parents in October 2024 for their views on school playtime and their childhood play too. They highlighted the importance of play (average importance rating of 4.95/5) yet emphasised areas to improve by telling us that *'they get bored'*, *'there's not much to play with'*, *'they sometimes get lonely'* and *'people get hit with footballs when not playing football'*. 55% of our surveyed parents believe that their children do not have the same play opportunities as their own childhood, highlighting areas such as the weather, traffic and also *'life just being too busy'*. When asked about muddy clothes or minor accidents from playing, 0% of our surveyed parents said they disapprove or strongly disapprove, with 100% saying that they either strongly approve, approve or neither approve nor disapprove.

## **4 Definition and Value of Play**

### **The Government's Play Strategy defines play as:**

'encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live'.

### **Play meets the four components of a child's development:**

- Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness);
- Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination);
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes); and
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

### **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.

## 5 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 (2012)

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge are not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

*‘Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children’s development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world’. (DCFS)*

At Wolston St Margaret’s, we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way. The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and state that:

**‘HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential dangers’. (HSE, 2013)**

Wolston St Margaret’s will use the Health and Safety Executive’s guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)) (**Appendix 1**) as its principle guiding document in making decisions relating to risk and play.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and will practice dynamic risk management (**Appendix 2**) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs. This approach will encourage the children to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

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).

## 6 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. Wolston St Margaret's recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in Reception, Wolston St Margaret's does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervision will take remote and ranging 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.

Our school grounds have been split into 5 zones, allowing adults to patrol a large amount of ground, whilst always being visible and accessible for the children. First aiders are present both outside and in the hall, with walkie-talkies used to ensure clear and constant communication between the Outside Play Team and the Inside Play Team, as well as the Staffroom.

## 7 The Adult's Role in Play

**We, as an entire staff, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground which will include regular play assemblies, Junior Leader involvement, surveys and other pupil voice outlets.**

The adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with OPAL ([www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Wolston St Margaret's. In addition to this, the Wolston St Margaret's Play Team (**Appendix 3**) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, the governing body and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. Lunch time supervisors will take on the role of the Play Team. They will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children: to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. The Play Team will be guided by OPAL and the Play Principles (**Appendix 4**) to ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. 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.

## 8 Children's Role in Play

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy (**Appendix 5**). In it will also include the rights and responsibilities of the children to:

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences.
- Respect and look after each other their environment and equipment.
- To take responsibility of their actions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour.
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody.

This children's charter will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions and dialogue in class and with the School Council.

## 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.

At Wolston St Margaret's we will:

- use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging the children to value natural or found objects for play.
- include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors.
- ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks, explore and use their imagination and creativity.
- expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things.
- give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors.
- enrich the quality of the environment to maximise the variety of play types (**Appendix 6**) and increase play value.
- ensure that the play space is an integrated area where all children from Nursery to Year 6 can play safely.
- teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the equipment available and ensure they take an active part in doing this.
- promote children's love, pride and enjoyment of the outdoors, a key foundation for caring for the environment.
- help children develop confidence in team building and advocating their own rights.

We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain (**Appendix 7**).

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Health and Safety's Executive's Guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure

Children's Play And Leisure – Promoting A Balanced Approach – please see PDF attached.

Online Version: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

### Appendix 2. Benefit Risk Assessment Record Sheet

| Description of activity, principle or object   | Benefit or utility or related policy  | Who might be at risk and what kind of harm  | Description of risk management and maintenance agreed  | Nominated person                                       | Action date                 |
|--|---|---|--|--|-----------------------------|
| <p><b>Use of wooden pallets</b><br/>Stacking<br/>Den Building<br/>Carrying/Lifting<br/>Standing on<br/>Going under (bridge/house/dens)</p> | <p><b>Physical development</b> (strength, coordination, gross motor skills)<br/><b>Cognitive Skills</b> (problem solving, imaginative play)<br/><b>Social &amp; Emotional Skills</b> (teamwork, communication and collaboration)<br/><b>Mental Health benefits</b> (unstructured, exploratory play that gives a sense of achievement through creations)</p>   | <p><b>Who:</b> Students &amp; Play Team</p> <p><b>What:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Splinters, cuts and bruises</li> <li>Falling/collapsing structures</li> <li>Risk of nails in pallets</li> <li>Heavy lifting</li> <li>Trip hazard</li> <li>Misuse of pallets</li> <li>Slippery when wet</li> <li>Broken pallets</li> </ul>                    | <p>Agree stacking heights in play assembly (2)</p> <p>Agree the amount of children to carry each pallet in play assembly (4)</p> <p>Designated Play Team member placed in Den Building Zone to monitor</p> <p>Regular inspections carried out on pallets by site manager and Play Team</p>   | <p>OPAL Leads</p> <p>Site Manager</p> <p>Play Team</p> | <p>To inspect regularly</p> |
| <p><b>Use of wheelies</b><br/>Sit on scooters<br/>Cars<br/>Ripstiks</p>  | <p><b>Physical development</b> (balance, coordination, gross/fine motor skills, cardiovascular fitness, muscle development, reaction time &amp; spatial awareness)<br/><b>Cognitive Skills</b> (problem solving, decisions when riding, concentration and focus)<br/><b>Social &amp; Emotional Skills</b> (co-operative play, turn taking, teamwork, inclusivity &amp; resilience)<br/><b>Mental Health benefits</b> (Energetic movement &amp; stress relief)</p> | <p><b>Who:</b> Students &amp; Play Team</p> <p><b>What:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Falls and collisions</li> <li>Slippery surfaces</li> <li>Impact injuries</li> <li>Misuse of equipment (standing on sit-down scooters, riding too fast)</li> <li>Wear and tear of equipment rendering them unsafe</li> <li>Tripping over equipment</li> </ul> | <p>Create a designated zone for the use of wheelies (boundary marked by tyres)</p> <p>Agree appropriate use of wheelies in a play assembly</p> <p>Agree the amount of children using the Wheelie Zone at any one time in a play assembly</p> <p>Timer to swap over children</p> <p>Waiting list</p> <p>Ensure that children know how to, and use, protective equipment (helmet, elbow pads and knee pads) when appropriate e.g. when using Ripstiks</p> <p>Designated Play Team member ranging near the Wheelie Zone</p> | <p>OPAL Leads</p> <p>Site Manager</p> <p>Play Team</p> | <p>To inspect regularly</p> |

|  |   |   |   |   |                      |
|--|---|---|---|---|----------------------|
|  |   |   | Regular inspections carried out on wheeled items by site manager and Play Team<br>Ensure correct storage of wheeled items when not in use   |   |                      |
| <b>Tyres</b><br>Stacking<br>Den Building<br>Carrying/Lifting<br>Standing on<br>Going in<br>Rolling | <b>Physical development</b> (strength, coordination, gross motor skills, balance)<br><b>Cognitive Skills</b> (problem solving, imaginative play, creativity, spatial awareness)<br><b>Social &amp; Emotional Skills</b> (teamwork, communication and collaboration, resilience)<br><b>Mental Health benefits</b> (Energetic movement & stress relief) | <b>Who:</b> Students & Play Team<br><br><b>What:</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Falling/collapsing structures</li> <li>• Heavy lifting</li> <li>• Trip hazard</li> <li>• Misuse of tyres</li> <li>• Slippery when wet</li> <li>• Standing water in the tyres</li> <li>• Rough/damaged tyres</li> <li>• Getting stuck in the tyres</li> </ul> | Agree stacking heights in play assembly (2)<br><br>Set clear expectations of tyre use during play assembly<br><br>Create a 'Tyre Area' where children can get tyres from and where they should go at the end of play<br><br>Drill drainage holes in the tyres to prevent accumulation of water/standing water<br><br>Regular inspections carried out on tyres by site manager and Play Team   | OPAL Leads<br><br>Site Manager<br><br>Play Team | To inspect regularly |
| <b>Water Play</b>  | <b>Physical development</b> (Fine/gross motor skills, coordination)<br><b>Cognitive Skills</b> (Scientific exploration, creativity, imaginative play)<br><b>Social &amp; Emotional Skills</b> (Teamwork, turn-taking, communication, therapeutic experience)<br><b>Mental Health benefits</b> (Sensory rich experience, supports mindfulness)         | <b>Who:</b> Students & Play Team<br><br><b>What:</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slipping on wet surfaces</li> <li>• Stagnant water</li> <li>• Ingesting water</li> <li>• Drowning</li> </ul>   | Ensure water play is conducted in a designated water play area (near year 4 classroom)<br><br>Ranger to be allocated to this area<br><br>Regularly check for and remove excess puddles<br><br>Ensure clean, fresh water is used and that any stagnant water is disposed of<br><br>Agree use of water in play assembly (not for drinking, no running in zone (when icy), no splashing)<br><br>Agree on the number of children around each water tray | OPAL Leads<br><br>Site Manager<br><br>Play Team | To inspect regularly |

|  |   |  |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| <p><b><u>Hammocks and Slacklines</u></b></p> | <p><b>Physical Development:</b> Enhances balance, coordination, core strength, and motor skills.</p> <p><b>Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing:</b> Hammocks provide calming spaces; slacklines promote focus and resilience.</p> <p><b>Social Skills:</b> Encourages cooperation, turn-taking, and peer support.</p> <p><b>Risk Competence:</b> Helps children assess and manage physical risk in a controlled environment.</p> <p><b>Curriculum Links:</b> Supports EYFS/KS1/KS2 Physical Education and PSHE.</p> <p><b>Inclusion &amp; SEN:</b> Hammocks can serve as sensory regulation tools for neurodiverse pupils.</p> <p><b>Outdoor Play Policy:</b> Aligns with national recommendations for active and challenging play.</p> | <p><b>Who</b><br/>Children and the play team</p> <p><b>What</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minor injuries (bumps, bruises, sprains) from falls or misuse</li> <li>• Overstimulation, difficulty balancing or exiting equipment</li> <li>• Collision or entanglement due to crowding or unsafe behaviour</li> <li>• Risk of strain or incident during intervention or lifting</li> <li>• Slips, trips and falls due to poor grip or unsafe footing</li> </ul> | <p>Install over grass or soft play surface</p> <p>Clear user rules displayed and reinforced -Discussed during OPAL assembly</p> <p>Supervised use only during break/lunch/staffed sessions</p> <p>Daily visual checks by site staff/play leaders</p> <p>Use hammocks designed for children, with breathable and secure fastenings</p> <p>Install with minimal slack and no long hanging cords</p> <p>Agreed number of children allowed on hammocks at any one time (2 children in one hammock)</p> <p>Agreed number of children allowed on slacklines at any one time (4 children)</p> |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|

### Appendix 3. Structure of Adult Roles in Practice

#### OPAL Working Group

This is the team working directly with OPAL to ensure policy is in place and develop play and outdoor learning at Wolston St Margaret’s. It consists of:

- The Headteacher – Mrs Michelle Clemons
- Play Co-ordinators – Mrs Fiona Hunter and Mr Paul Scarlett
- Play Leader – Mr Nick Gray
- Parent/Staff Representative – Mrs Janelle Manners
- Parent Representative/Associate Governor – Mr Sam Gallant
- Caretaker – Mr Dave Carey

## Wolston St Margaret's Play Team

All adults working at the school are part of the Play Team and have a responsibility to follow this policy. When on the playground at playtimes all staff should act as Play Makers.

However, more specifically at lunch times the following structure exists:

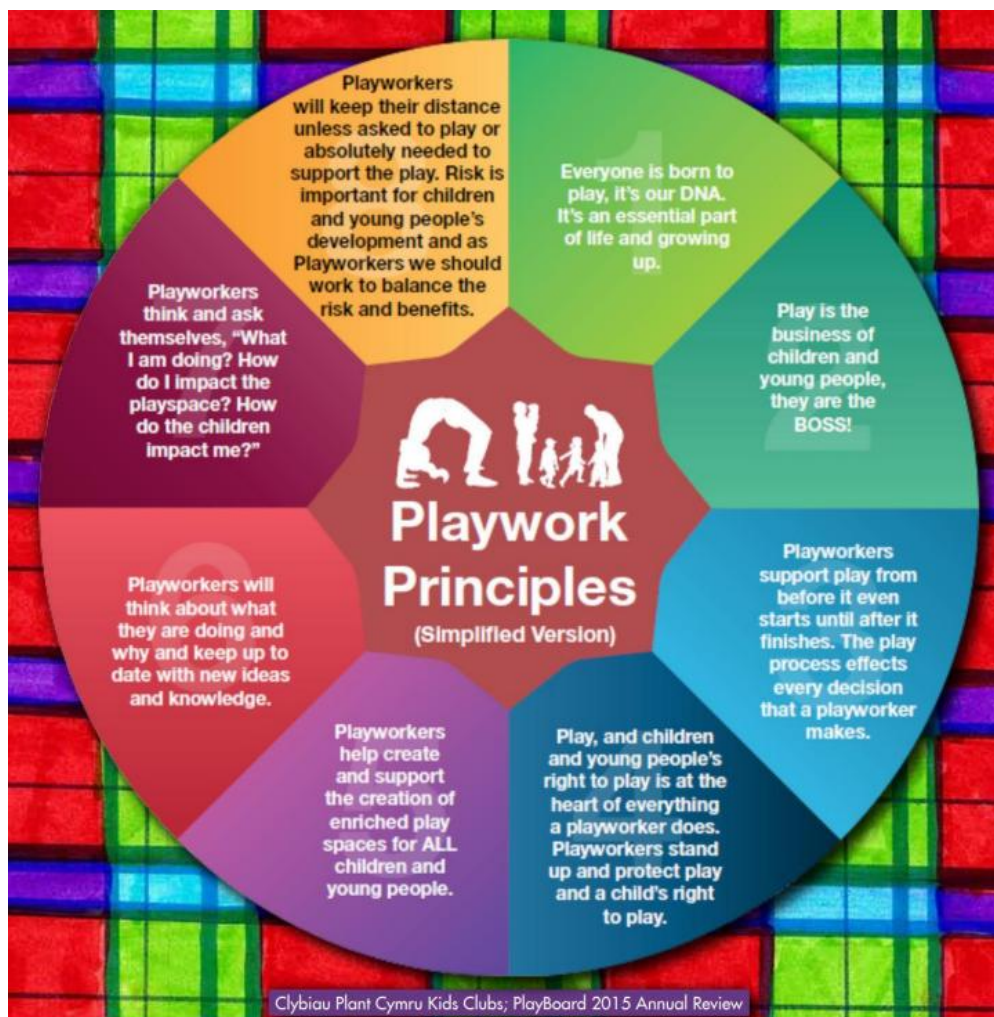
**Play Co-ordinator**  
(Leads and manages strategy)

**Play Leader**  
(Leads and manages playtimes)

**Assistant Play Leader**  
(Supports play leader and steps up in their absence)

**Play Makers**  
(Support children's' play as described in section 7)

### Appendix 4. Playwork Principles





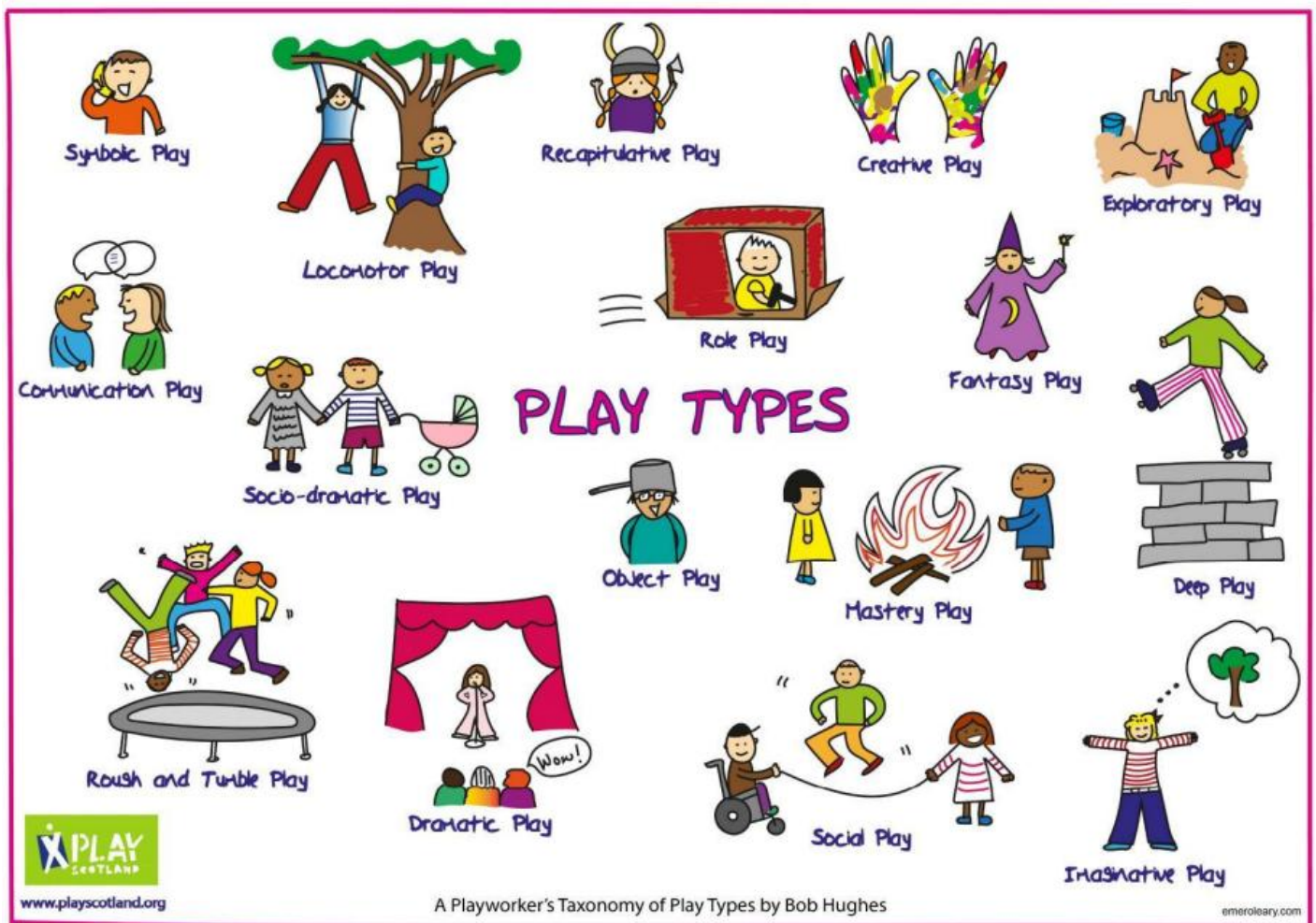
# Opal CHARTER FOR PLAY!

WE ALL HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY AND ENJOY OPAL.

WE HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE SURE  
EVERYONE ENJOYS PLAYTIME BY MAKING SURE:

- EVERYONE CHOOSES WHAT TO PLAY
- WE SHARE EQUIPMENT FAIRLY AND KINDLY
- WE TAKE CARE OF THE EQUIPMENT
- WE TREAT EACH OTHER HOW WE LIKE TO BE TREATED
- WE KEEP EVERYBODY SAFE
- WE ARE KIND TO OTHERS
- WE HELP PEOPLE IF THEY NEED US
- WE ALLOW PEOPLE TO JOIN IN GAMES
- WE ASK GROWNUPS IF WE NEED HELP TO SORT OUT OUR PROBLEMS
- WE LISTEN TO ONE AND ANOTHER
- WE PLAY SAFELY.

## Appendix 6. Play Types



## Appendix 7. Best Play – What Play Provision Should Do for Children

Best Play – What Play Provision Should Do For Children – see PDF attached.

Online Version: <http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf>