



# PlayAction Guide

## ORGANISING A PLAYScheme



The most common and numerous type of organised play facility for the school-age child in Britain is the Playscheme. These take place in cities, towns, villages, hamlets, and are to be found in church and village halls, schools, community centres, and every conceivable type of building, rarely purpose-built for children's use (sometimes in the middle of a field without a building, which is NOT recommended in any circumstance).

More often than not, they are run by volunteers (parents etc), with some paid leadership or help. In many areas, grants are given by local councils (parish, district and county) and departments (social services, education, health authority), donations can be obtained from trusts, local businesses, churches and local organisations, whilst many schemes charge a small daily fee, plus raise a lot of money themselves. [Contact Fair Play for advice on sources of funding.]

Schemes run from e.g. 3 complete consecutive days to 5 whole weeks, with every conceivable period in between - e.g. two weeks, mornings only, or three weeks all-day. They are held for all manner of reasons, from wanting to tackle local holiday problems (petty crime, working parents needing a facility, single parents having under-fives and school age children at home at the same time, and strangely enough, some adults just like to see kids having a whale of a time!)

### PLANNING AHEAD

The necessity of adequate preparation cannot be over-stressed - we recommend that someone or a small sub-group of three or four starts in the previous autumn! And do find out when councils are making their estimates for the next year: they need to know about possible new expenditures of grant-aid, again sometime in the previous autumn. The actual application for grant-aid may be later, and your councils will advise - each one may have a different system and pattern!) The sub-group should prepare a detailed timetable of planning, preparation and implementation for the scheme management which should also be presented with a budget of income and expenditure.

### ACCOMMODATION

A major hurdle is often accommodation - some halls are very reluctant to "risk" damage etc and many schools still remain empty despite clear encouragement from the Government and from local education authorities - pricing is also another problem, as schools and halls charge rentals which may be beyond the means of many schemes. [Another PlayAction Guide covers this subject.] A playscheme needs an adequate covered building with washing and toilet facilities, space for indoor activity (craft, games, quiet room etc) and storage, together with outdoor space for games and informal play. Preferably, the outdoor area should be fenced and safe from traffic, dogs etc and easily supervised. The building should have proper fire precautions and equipment and access to a phone - or sometimes a mobile phone can be hired e.g. from the local youth office or resource centre, as can various items of equipment.

### TRAINING AND COMPETENCE

It is vital that the people who run schemes are suitable, imaginative and competent. There may be training run by your local authority, or by a local Play Council/ Forum, or Regional Play organisation/ network, or National Playwork Training and Education Centre, or you may wish to combine with other playschemes and organise your own. Fair Play also will help organise a training event at low cost, drawing on grass-roots play workers and activists for expertise.

There is now a Playwork National Vocational Qualification - it is not the only relevant qualification, and people may be suitably experienced without any formal qualification although they will need to show competence to similar levels in order to satisfy registration and 'fit persons' criteria - see below.



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## REGISTRATION UNDER THE CHILDREN ACT



From October 1991, any playscheme running for 2 hours or more, and more than six sessions in a year, and having children aged under 8 must be registered with Ofsted, a provision of the Children Act 1989. The registration is granted upon a number of criteria including a concept of 'fit persons', ratios of helpers, suitability of venue and facilities etc. Fair Play has issued a PlayAction Guide in this matter. Those operating activities with children aged 8 and over may have to obtain Certificates of Suitability from Ofsted.

The Government's advice is that social services are to take a sympathetic and not unduly rigid/ exclusive approach to registration. The aim is to raise and assure standards not prevent good schemes from starting or continuing. Certainly, Fair Play strongly recommends that children under 8 should not be excluded from schemes just to avoid registration. The onus is on the management to inform social services of an intention to operate. A fee is chargeable and an annual re-inspection fee. The registration applies to particular premises so if these are changed from one scheme to another, a fresh application for registration should be made.

The management will need to decide if the scheme is to be fixed membership - everyone enrolls in advance and numbers are limited - or "open access", which means children register by the day without prior notice.

## CHECKS AND SAFEGUARDS

The need to check the suitability of people to take part in schemes is a vexed matter but Fair Play believes a first duty in playwork is to protect children from harm so far as is possible. No child should ever be made to suffer an appalling ordeal and aftermath for want of foresight.

The responsibility lies clearly with the management of each scheme to decide on the level and extent of checks - there may also be a requirement of Social Services that some helpers at least are checked, as part of registration under the Children Act. This can take time, so the planning of schemes requires this to be taken into account. Fair Play recommends that Social Services checks are sought also, plus a personal reference and a medical opinion - see **Child Protection in Playwork** produced by Fair Play, £10.00, for full treatment and a practical working model system.



Scheme managements will need to decide at what stage to operate a system. The first step is to get everyone who applies to sign a declaration relating to previous convictions (and cautions, bind-overs, conditional discharges and pending prosecutions). Because this type of work, paid or unpaid, is exempt from the provisions of Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation - that is, it MUST ALWAYS be declared when asked - failure to provide information should mean an application goes no further. The form should contain a declaration to be signed by the applicant stating that the person is telling the truth, giving permission for police, social services, GP's, and referees to be approached, and indemnifying the management against claims arising from the checks process.

There should be a general question about criminal convictions etc of any kind - if the person affirms they have a conviction, bind-over, caution etc, they should be asked specifically if the person has a conviction relating to children (i.e. under-18), and Fair Play suggests violence, drugs and alcohol.

The person should also be asked whether they have been disqualified from caring for children, had a child taken into care, been refused child-minder or playscheme/care registration, and similar matters (again covered in the Fair Play pack above). These questions can be asked of Social Services - as with police checks, the person's written permission must be obtained.





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Obtaining information as to someone's medical suitability to undertake work with children (for their own sakes as well as the children's) can involve issues of doctor/ patient confidence, so asking a general opinion as opposed to detailed medical information may be advisable - doctors need to understand the situation a person may be asked to work in so there should be mention of likely physical, mental and other challenges. The applicant can be asked whether or not there is any medical or other general information that should be taken into account. Obviously, whilst information should be sought in all cases, the actual process of checks need only be carried out on those who are being short-listed, or even after decision to appoint but before taking up a position.

Managements will need to ensure confidentiality and security of records.

When should people be allowed to start? This is a management decision. In all cases Fair Play recommends that until a police check has come back the person should be under 1 to 1 supervision at least, and any appointment made conditional upon clearance.

Fair Play operates a police checks scheme for staff and volunteers of play organisations, as part of a national scheme which enables Job/Volunteer applicants to be checked against police records. Schemes have to be members of Fair Play and also enter into an agreement about operating the checks. [Details from Fair Play - address below]



## HEALTH AND SAFETY

Police checks etc are part of a general commitment to children's and worker's safety. There should be a management policy on health and safety setting out standards and also practical arrangements for fire alarms/drills, accident and incident reporting etc. An **Accident and Incident Book/Forms** should be kept and filled in by anyone observing, attending or treating an accident or incident and countersigned by the scheme leader - there is legislation covering accidents which **MUST** be reported to the authorities - check with the Health & Safety Executive or your local authority.

Every playscheme should carry a properly-stocked first-aid box and someone competent to use it, and it is recommended there be at least one person with a recognised first-aid qualification on each session of the scheme. Managements may wish to cover the cost of training in this respect, which will need to be budgeted.

It is recommended that disposable gloves are kept for situations involving e.g. blood, vomit etc, and Fair Play publishes a guide **AIDS & Playwork** dealing with the needs of children and helpers who may be HIV positive - such people should not be excluded from schemes, and the precautions needed apply equally to the prevention of spread of hepatitis B which has a much higher infectivity and a much greater fatality rate. Attention should be paid to the issue of vaccinations for e.g. tetanus - a GP or health centre will advise. [A healthy side-note: keep a bottle or two of nit treatment - there are various brands available - in case of the spotting of uninvited "little guests". Some health centres may provide them gratis if told of the scheme's existence. Now please have a scratch before you read on ....]

Equipment transport and premises should be checked before scheme start and inspected by the leader throughout the scheme duration.

## PUBLIC LIABILITY ETC INSURANCE

Insurance arrangements should be adequate in terms of cover of children, helpers, management and general public. There are a number of group arrangements where playschemes can be covered for employer liability (which is compulsory for paid workers and is always extended to volunteers when specified that this is what you wish), public liability



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ity (and many local authorities now insist on a minimum cover of £2 million per incident when hiring out their premises), equipment cover etc. The NPFA publishes a sound guide Insurance for Children's Play (St Chad's Place, London WC1X 9HH, Tel: 0207 843 6303).

## TAX AND NATIONAL INSURANCE PAYMENTS

There is a quite simple requirement about income tax and national insurance - these must be paid on any wage, honorarium, fee etc unless Inland Revenue in a specified person's case indicates otherwise (or, of course, the person's payment falls below the minimum thresholds for payment). Expenses can be paid and not taxed provided they are acceptable in type and amount to Inland Revenue. Our advice is to contact the local Tax Office, explain what you are doing and what payment arrangements are contemplated. They will rule/advise.

Students in higher/ further education whose total annual earnings fall below taxation threshold can avoid the process of paying of tax and then reclaiming it by producing a P38S form, available from the Tax Office. If a scheme has to complete end of year returns to the Tax Office, then all payments except expenses should be listed in the returns where stipulated, whether tax and NI were deductible or not, and helpers told this is the situation.

## MATERIALS AND IDEAS



Materials can be expensive - we fully recommend membership of the excellent network of Scrapstores, worth the annual fee and hire of a mini-bus as one journey will often suffice for a range of incredible materials and basic items such as card, not just for one scheme but for two or three in the same area. Also, yes, the inevitable collections of scrap materials.

The planning stage of any scheme should examine the activities and opportunities on offer and a programme drawn up of e.g. trips, themed days, specialised people to be brought in etc.

It is a good idea to start and build-up an Activities Book in which is kept a range of ideas, articles, references, notes etc about possible activities and skills. There are various handbooks, guides etc on crafts, games, activities - advice available from Fair Play.

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Play is a universal need of all children and Fair Play sets a standard (PlayAction Guide, Equal Opportunities in Playwork) setting out objectives of equal opportunities, applying to all children, and helpers, in line with the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31 which deals with play and leisure.

This commitment applies to gender, race, culture, religious and other belief (or non-belief), sexual orientation, disability (or levels of ability) etc. For example, many schemes could accommodate children with disabilities but are perhaps wary of doing so. (See PlayAction Guide, Play and Special Needs). The aim is that every child should be able to access facilities in their own neighbourhoods and that where possible children of every background, ability and both genders should be able to meet with and play in one another's company.

**This has been a brief introduction. For further advice, contact Fair Play for Children at 35 Lyon Street, Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO21 1BW, Tel: 01243-869922, Fax: 01243-862072, e-mail: [fairplay@arunet.co.uk](mailto:fairplay@arunet.co.uk) or, Visit our Web Site: <http://www.arunet.co.uk/fairplay/>**