



PLAY CHARTER

The Play Australia Play Charter is underpinned by the actions and vision of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 31 (General Comment 2013)**:

The right to play and informal recreation, for all children and young people up to 18 years of age is contained in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 31 includes a number of related, but distinct, rights: rest, recreation, leisure, play, participation in cultural life and the arts.

Article 31

- 1. States Parties recognize the right of the child 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.*
- 2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.*

CHALLENGES

The United Nations Article 31 and recent General Comment recognise the constraints to play for children and young people worldwide. There are many identified constraints and societal issues that potentially affect how children in Australia play:

- adults not understanding the importance of play;
- reduced risk taking and physical challenge creating an 'over protection' of children;
- lack of independent mobility – perceptions of traffic and 'stranger danger' anxiety;
- technology, other family demands and organised activities absorbing time for unstructured play;
- lack of prioritised time for unstructured play;
- lack of tolerance for children and adolescents in public spaces;
- lack of access to nature; and,
- increasing populations and urbanised living with settlement planning designs limiting access to outdoor space suitable for unstructured and 'unsupervised' play.

PLAY AUSTRALIA

Play Australia advocates for healthy play opportunities for children, young people and the wider community. The purpose of Play Australia is to promote the value of play and inspire active healthy outdoor play opportunities that are accessible to all.

WE BELIEVE THAT:

- Play is essential to the **health, development and well-being** of children.
“Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of children and youth.”¹ Play is a behaviour that is a unique way of being, a way of perceiving, feeling and acting in the world. Through play children develop a range of flexible and adaptable responses to the environment.
- There is a need to raise **awareness** of the **importance** and **essential role** of play.
Many adults have a poor understanding of the right of children to engage in play and its fundamental importance for their well-being, health and development. Value is often placed on structured activity, education and learning as priorities. When adults lack insight into the value of play for children or are unable to advocate for their right to play, we must work to raise awareness of play.
- **Play is essential for all ages** and **intergenerational** play is important.
Children need to play with other children and to play by themselves. People of all ages can interact with children in playful activities and provide opportunities for children to engage in play.
- **Time and access to unstructured play** must be a priority.
Unstructured or free play is play controlled by children rather than adults and it is undertaken for its own sake without prescribed boundaries. The characteristics of free play include control, uncertainty, flexibility, and creativity. Free play is important because:
 - neurological research highlights the significance of play in the development of the brain’s structure and chemistry;
 - child-controlled play is necessary for optimal physical, social and emotional functioning; and,
 - free play teaches children to share, cooperate, initiate and resolve problems.
- **Unstructured play outdoors** is essential to health and well-being.
Children today are spending less time outdoors in unstructured play than in any other time in history. There is growing evidence investigating the links between physical activity and academic performance.
Children are more physically active when they are outdoors. Lifelong habits of physical activity for health and wellbeing can be enhanced by positive active outdoor experiences as a child.

¹ Ginsburg K, “The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent child bonds,” American Academy of Pediatrics 2007.

- **Independent mobility** is essential as a child grows.
We must create environments that allow children to move about freely and safely, to play, visit friends, walk to school or the shops. We must promote and encourage parents to nurture the skills needed by their children to be independently mobile.
- **Risk and challenge** through play are important experiences.
Children need and want to stretch and challenge themselves when they play. Play opportunities and play spaces that are stimulating, sometimes through being familiar and sometimes through being new are exciting and allow children to encounter and learn about risk. Play helps children to build confidence, learn skills and develop resilience at their own pace. The benefits of taking risks very often outweigh the lesser possibility of injury. The real risk to health, development and well-being is in *not* playing.
- **Access to nature** must be provided for all children.
Natural areas offer a great deal of amenity, beauty, changeability and unpredictability. They add to a child's understanding of ecology and the world's natural system. Constantly changing natural environments provide complex variations of texture, sound, light, smell, colour and temperature that challenge children to approach each interaction in new ways.² We build custodians of the future for our parks and natural areas through children having wonderful experiences with nature in their childhood.
- **Embracing young people in public spaces** is an important part of valuing them.
There is a lack of tolerance to many adolescents and young people in public spaces. Exclusion from community spaces sends a negative message to young people and misrepresents their importance in the world. Embracing adolescents and young people in public spaces encourages their development as valued community members.
- We must **plan cities** with children and young people in mind.
More than 50% of the world's population live in cities and the figures are expected to escalate to 70% by 2050. As our cities grow it is important to ensure there is still space provided in local neighbourhoods for unstructured outdoor play, and that it is well distributed so children can access it independently when they are old enough. Children don't just play on playground equipment. We must think about children and young people when planning our cities, to allow them rich experiences for play in their neighbourhood.

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² Source: *The Good Play Space Guide: "I can play too"* Department for Victorian Communities, 2007