

PLAY Streets



What is a Play Street?

A Play Street is a resident-led temporary road closure for play, which is a step towards street play becoming a normal, everyday activity for children everywhere.

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM A STREET PARTY?

- Residents don't have to move parked cars and can still drive in and out of the street at walking speed
- The road closure is stewarded
- The emphasis is on free, child-led play, not on organised activities
- Play Streets are for a short period (1-3 hrs) up to once a week
- Play Streets have the potential to become a normal, regular part of street life. For more information see www.playingout.net

TEN REASONS why 'Playing Out' is a good thing for children

- 1. Children need to play.** Play is vital for their physical and emotional development and for their social learning.
- 2. The street is a blank canvas** allowing for truly child-led free play, providing benefits over structured or organised activities.
- 3. Children like to play near home.** A 2007 poll found that 71% of adults played out on their street as children every day compared to only 21% of children today. (Playday Poll, 2007)
- 4. Children need ample space to play energetically.** Many homes do not have gardens and in towns these are often small. Not all children can get to parks and other open spaces easily; the street is instantly accessible.
- 5. Playing in the street increases community cohesion.** It brings neighbours of all ages together by providing a sense of common space and shared ownership, engendering collective responsibility and increasing the safety of the neighbourhood.
- 6. Street play creates new opportunities for socialising and friendships** across age groups, or with children that go to other schools.
- 7. Children learn valuable social skills when they play out** and gain understanding about the world around them by dealing independently with situations as they arise.
- 8. Playing in the street allows for 'semi-supervised' play.** Children are far more likely to play outside every day if allowed to play near their home, rather than relying on parents to take them somewhere else, like the park.
- 9. The street is the "starting point for all journeys"** (Tim Gill, 2007). The ability to play independently in the street is a first step towards greater self-confidence around the neighbourhood – to visit friends, go to the park or walk to school.
- 10. Streets constitute the vast majority of public space in the city.** They can and should be places where people can sit, talk, read, play and walk – and even sing and dance! The only way this will happen is if we start to use streets differently.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do children need to play in the street when there are parks nearby?

Street play is very different to a family outing. It is on the doorstep which allows unstructured, child-led play. Children playing together on their street build a sense of community, making your street a safer and friendlier place.

Why can't children just play in their own back gardens?

In towns, if you have a garden at all, space can be limited and the experience isolated. In street play children meet and form friendships with other local children of different ages. Big-rope skipping, hopscotch, skating, cycling and scooting can be impossible in a small back garden!

This is inconvenient for me as a car driver; why should I let it happen?

To make it safe for everyone, residents can drive in and out at walking speed if they need to. Most sessions only last an hour or two before rush hour and at weekends. If you have concerns, talk to the organisers and hopefully you can reach a solution. You may find it easier than normal to park on the street, since only residents are allowed in and out during the sessions.

Will you still let visitors and deliveries through?

Yes. Through traffic is not permitted but if a delivery needs to be made or someone is visiting, a steward will escort the car at walking pace to their destination.

This will have a negative impact on my business; why should I let it happen?

As part of the application process, everyone affected by the closure should be consulted. If you are concerned, talk to the organisers – there is usually a way around things if you really need access for customers, although please remember there is no right to parking on a public highway, even for residents. You might find that being accommodating or offering support improves your business image and gets new customers!

Aren't roads just for cars?

Until the 1970s, street play was common. It has gradually become accepted that residential streets are simply places to drive and park cars. The street is our main public space and the place where a sense of community can be created. The Playing Out movement is partly about challenging the perception that residential streets are just highways and to demonstrate their possibilities as social spaces for everyone.

Why do you need to close the road? We just played out as kids.

Times have changed. Streets are dominated by traffic and it is no longer normal to see children playing out. In some very quiet streets a road closure might not be necessary for children to play safely in the road, but closing the road to through traffic and having stewards provides the reassurance parents need to allow their children to play out. Playing Out sessions are a first step towards changing attitudes about the place of cars in residential streets. Ideally, our streets should be spaces where people of all ages and cars can co-exist happily.

Won't a Playing Out session bring other children to my street?

Playing Out sessions are organised by residents and publicised on their own street and, possibly, immediately neighbouring streets. They are for the children to have a chance to play right outside their front door. The street is a public space, so it is not desirable to exclude people coming in from outside, but the main draw for children and parents is having direct access to your own house and toys, and getting to know your neighbours.

I'm worried children playing outside my door will disturb me.

Our experience is that streets are quieter during Playing Out sessions than when open to traffic! In towns and cities we all tolerate noise from other people's activities. The towns and villages belong to children too and it is their right to use the space the way they need to. Playing Out sessions are only for an hour or two and take place once a week at most. If there is a persistent problem with neighbours complaining about children making an unreasonable amount of noise, try to reach a solution everyone is happy with.

Won't my car be damaged?

If you are nervous, you may wish to park elsewhere during Playing Out sessions. In our experience children scoot, skate or cycle down the middle of the road and we have heard of very few incidents

of damage. The risk is not much greater than from children scooting, skating or cycling on the pavement, possibly less. Parents are responsible for their own children during Playing Out sessions but any adult who sees a child causing damage should talk to them or their parents about it. The organisers and stewards will do their best to ensure that children play safely and responsibly.

Who is going to pay if my property gets damaged?

Parents have responsibility for their own children, and residents need to resolve any issues with each other and their insurers.

Who will safeguard my children if I let them play out?

Parents and carers are responsible for their own children during Playing Out sessions.

I don't like the idea of children playing out. Won't they get up to mischief?

Getting up to mischief is a part of childhood, and so is being told off by adults other than our own parents! Parents are responsible for their own children, but if any adult sees a child misbehaving or causing damage or injury they should take responsibility to speak to them or their parents about it in a reasonable way. Being kept in check by other adults in our community is an important learning experience.



Information in this leaflet comes from Playing Out – a national organisation supporting anyone wanting to enable children to play out safely on their streets. For more resources go to www.playingout.net