

GCE Health and Social Care and Childcare

Unit 3 - Playwork and the role of the playworker

What is playwork?

Playwork is a method of working with children where children determine and control the content and intentions of their play, rather than being led, or directed by adults. The play process for children includes exploring, discovering things, testing their own skills and abilities, learning from their successes and mistakes to build resilience, problem solving skills and creative thinking. Through play, children learn about risk. This is an essential element of confidence, self-esteem and competence. Play is a service planned by adults for children.

The role of the playworker

Children's play experiences are enriched by skilled playworkers who can turn physical spaces into places of opportunity, imagination and belonging. Playwork is a profession. Playworkers train to do their job and gain qualifications in playwork. Playworkers create opportunities and places where children and young people can play freely, with confidence, and with a wide range of opportunities and possibilities – where the adults involved understand the nature and importance of all aspects of children's play and work to support it. Playworkers do not play with children, they allow children to extend their own play and they protect and improve the play area so that it is a rich play environment. Playworkers ensure that the play space is inclusive - supporting each child to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. Playworkers understand the need for children to experience risk and challenge as part of their play. Playworkers do not direct or organise play; they are trained to judge when or whether to intervene.



Playwork principles



- All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
- Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated; that is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
- The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
- For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas.
- The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people to create a space in which they can play.
- The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound and up-to-date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
- Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and the impact of children's and young people's play on the playworker.
- Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker interventions must balance risk with developmental benefit and well-being of children.