

ACTIVE

PLAYFUL COMMUNITIES

A guide to providing time, space and permission for play





OVERVIEW

Previously it was widely accepted that tamariki (5-11 years) and rangatahi (12-18 years) would go out and freely play in their local communities with their friends and whānau – unfortunately, a loss of access to streets and outdoor areas near homes is making this increasingly more challenging. This ability to move freely about neighbourhoods has largely been restricted by traffic volumes and adult fears and perceptions, which means tamariki and rangatahi are spending more time indoors or at organised activities, and less time being actively playful outdoors.

Playing happens in the gaps – often when adults are not looking, actively supervising or during moments in time where the conditions that support play provide ‘an opportunity’. These conditions include:

- ✓ A moment in the day that is without structure (i.e. there is time)
- ✓ The physical environment or taiao (i.e. there is space and/or facilities)
- ✓ That no one cares why it occurs (i.e. it is permitted)
- ✓ Other tamariki and/or people and/or equipment.

All children have a right to play as recognised by Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).



When these conditions are right and in place, tamariki and rangatahi will play.

These moments in time are arguably the most important part of the day for our tamariki and rangatahi. Moments they can be themselves free from structure, judgement and expectations, where freedoms are celebrated, and most importantly, when they are happy. When tamariki and rangatahi are happy they can achieve amazing things. There are no failures, just lessons, success and escapism from the real world.

The benefits of active play are well documented – it is essential for growth in cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. It develops fundamental movement skills and knowledge, fosters creativity and innovation, and builds an ability to identify and manage risk. Allowing tamariki and rangatahi the space (freedom) to have large amounts of this playful time in their day can also promote cultural revitalisation, and stronger connections to the physical environment or space as they play with, in and through the environment or taiao.

Play is the one activity that does not suffer ‘drop off’ at a young age. All tamariki and rangatahi are playful, it does not generally cost to participate, and it is perhaps the only opportunities in their day when they can be themselves and choose their own destiny or outcomes. It is important to make sure our tamariki and rangatahi have the time, space and permission to play.

THE PURPOSE

Auckland is a complex multi-cultural environment with many challenges and unparalleled opportunities to increase and sustain participation in sport and recreation. This has led to the establishment of **The Auckland Approach to Community Sport >>**, a strategic response aiming to create a world-class community sport system in *Tāmaki Makaurau*, community by community.

The purpose of this play guide is to address the barriers to play and ensure tamariki and rangatahi have enough time, space and permission to play as part of their everyday lives. This guide provides ideas for parents / whānau, schools, and providers of play, to make communities more playful and includes examples of how / where it has been done in different parts of *Tāmaki Makaurau*.

Ensuring tamariki and rangatahi have the time, space and permission to play helps build a healthier and thriving *Tāmaki Makaurau*. Creating opportunities to play contributes not only to children's lives, but also to the wellbeing of their families, whānau and wider community (multi-generational).



PLAY AT OR NEAR HOME/WHĀNAU PA

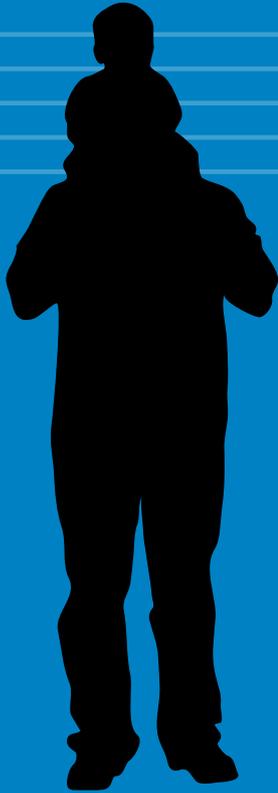
When neighbours do not know each other, there may be uncertainty. Parents / caregivers are likely to stop their tamariki from playing outside and other adults may not welcome tamariki playing in outdoor areas near their homes.

Tamariki who play in their own neighbourhood have a greater sense of connection and belonging to that area. Making tamariki, parents / caregivers and whānau more visible in neighbourhoods helps to remind others that playing outside is normal. Allowing tamariki to play on the doorstep, in the back yard, or on the footpath can also help you learn more about your neighbours.



Here are some things to try:

- Sit outside the front of your house with your tamariki
- Let your tamariki take their toys outside
- Use chalk to draw pictures together on the driveway / footpath
- Get some bubbles or make your own
- Go for walks around the neighbourhood and let your tamariki take their scooters, skates, skateboards or bikes
- Leave toys (e.g. action figures, cars, animals) lying around to encourage play
- Invent some games or play **traditional ones** >> (e.g. hide and seek, tag)
- Play traditional games and different cultures as part of the **Village Games** >>
- Tie a rope swing on a sturdy tree
- Use the cracks in the footpath as a tight rope that you balance on
- Take part in play challenges with **Goose(chase)** >>



PLAY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Fast-moving traffic and high levels of on-street parking in residential areas is one of the biggest dangers to tamariki and rangatahi. In many suburbs, street play has been replaced by vehicles.

Here are some things to try:

- If you live in a side street or cul de sac, you and your neighbours can contact Auckland Council / Auckland Transport for details on the closing streets process to non-resident traffic for a few hours
- Arrange footpath play where you and your neighbours agree to supervise
- organise play street sessions with your neighbours
- Talk to your school to arrange daily timed closures outside the school grounds at drop off and pick up times

e.g. [Here Comes the Sun Pt Chev >>](#)

[Play Streets Avondale >>](#) [Play Streets Takanini >>](#)





PLAY WITH EQUIPMENT

Tamariki and rangatahi like having a range of things to play with. These do not need to be expensive. Items like boxes, tubes, tyres, and old sheets often make the best pieces of equipment to play with. Having loose parts to play with helps tamariki to extend their play by giving them resources they need.

Here are some things to try:

- Talk with your neighbours about putting large containers / wheelie bins / trailers / pods somewhere accessible and fill with loose parts (consider a range of colours and sensory elements)
- Arrange a group of volunteers (caretakers) to be responsible for putting out and clearing away the containers / wheelie bins / trailers / pods
- Speak with your local hardware store, trades person (e.g. plumber, builder, electrician) or **Council Community Recycling Centre** >> to see if they can donate any equipment
- Ask members of the community to donate equipment to the containers / wheelie bins / trailers / pods
- Organise mentoring sessions with others about how to use loose parts
- Invite tamariki and rangatahi / local iwi to provide input into the design, name and contents of play equipment (e.g. run a competition, provide a cultural narrative and story)

e.g. **Sport Waitākere's Magic Playbox** >>
Conscious Kids Loose Parts Fun >>

PLAY ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

A lot of school grounds have features that are good for play – open space, equipment, natural features, and concrete areas for skating and scooting – however, many are not available outside of school hours.



Here are some things to try:

- Encourage your local school to consider the options to make the school grounds available for play before / after school and at weekends (it may be valuable to highlight the lack of space in the neighbourhood or emphasise how parents might feel happier allowing their tamariki and rangatahi to play in a place they find safe)
- Provide a wide range of movable equipment (see play equipment) for tamariki and rangatahi to play with before school, at interval / lunch time and after school
- Encourage teachers to take an intentional (minimal intervention / supervision) role in play and **playful learning** >> – observe and talk with tamariki and rangatahi (see Encouraging Play section)
- (create 'no rules' for tamariki and rangatahi on school grounds (say yes to play)
- Set times during the school day for free play
- Make provisions to open early to support tamariki and rangatahi who need extra time to feel comfortable
- Install play safe signage at the school gates to reinforce play.
e.g. Swanson School >>





PLAYFUL EVENTS

Pop up community play events are great ways to meet with other people in a fun and friendly way. A playful event does not need any specialist equipment (such as bouncy castles). The aim is to provide time, space and permission to play – anyone can do this.



Here are some things to try:

- Consider a big 'wow' event in an open public area (using bouncy castles, facilitators etc.) to raise awareness
- Look for community pop-up play events already on offer
- If you wish to plan a play event, get a group together to decide on a date and venue – these can be held in open public areas such as parks, sports fields, beaches and civic spaces
- Create play zones at existing sport matches to give tamariki and rangatahi an area to play in.

e.g. Pop Up Play >>



PLAY SPACES

Papatūānuku – the land – provides play spaces in different shapes and sizes. These could include a favourite spot under a tree on a street or a local playground. While designated play spaces (e.g. **parks / beaches>>**, **playgrounds>>**, **Māra Hūpara>>**) are important, so too is the opportunity to play in other public open spaces.

Here are some things to consider:

- Look for unused spaces in your neighbourhood – is it easy to get to (e.g. public transport, car parking), and is it safe and suitable for playing?
- Does it already have good features – trees to allow nature play and build huts, hills and slopes to roll down, long open grass areas to play in?
- Is there an organisation that can help with enhancing the space – design, maintenance, funding?
- Will the area flood? Is it lacking shelter from the sun or a wind tunnel?
- What amenities are nearby – shelter, seating, toilets?
- Is there any protocol that you need to be aware of? (e.g. on a marae, at places of worship)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with local whānau and tamariki / rangatahi is integral to identifying opportunities and challenges to meeting play needs. Potential engagement approaches include:

CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS

Through a facilitated workshop, brainstorm possible ideas with tamariki / rangatahi to understand what they want, and then design one solution further with the group to test it.

NEIGHBOURHOOD MIND MAPPING

Ask each tamariki / rangatahi to individually draw a map of their neighbourhood illustrating their journey between home to school / play spaces, noting key features on the route as well as places they play or travel.

URBAN SPACE EVALUATIONS

Break tamariki / rangatahi into small groups then give them a play space and ask them to label different features (e.g. the trees to build huts, the hills and slopes to roll down, the long grass to play in) with post it notes. As a facilitator you can ask them to note 'what they like', 'what they don't like' and 'what could be done to improve the space'.

SHARE AN IDEA SESSIONS

Provide a variety of colourful craft materials and ask tamariki / rangatahi to create something that represents their favourite play experience.



e.g. Papakura Intermediate >>



ENCOURAGING PLAY

Parents / caregivers, teachers or older whānau - you can help tamariki and rangatahi play by saying:

NOTICE HOW... these rocks are slippery, that branch is strong

DO YOU SEE... your friends nearby, the colour of the water?

TRY MOVING... your feet carefully, your arms quickly

CAN YOU HEAR... the singing birds, the wind?

DO YOU FEEL... stable on that log, the heat from the ground?

ARE YOU FEELING... scared, excited, tired, safe?

CAN YOU SMELL... grass and flowers, salt from the sea?

You can help tamariki and rangatahi with problem solving by saying:

WHAT'S YOUR PLAN... if you climb that boulder, cross that log?

WHAT CAN YOU USE... to get across, for your adventure?

WHERE WILL YOU... climb that tree, roll down the hill?

HOW WILL YOU... get down, go up, get across?

WHO WILL... be with you, go with you, help you if?





EVERY MOMENT CAN
BE A PLAYFUL MOMENT
- IT DOESN'T REALLY
MATTER HOW YOU PLAY.

WHAT'S MORE IMPORTANT
IS THAT YOU GIVE
TAMARIKI AND RANGATAHI
THE TIME, SPACE AND
PERMISSION TO PLAY.

IF YOU LET GO AND BE
CARE-FREE JUST A LITTLE.
YOU'LL SEE THAT PLAY
EMERGES NATURALLY.

LOOKING FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

There is a range of resources available to assist you with providing time, space and permission for play.

- [Cities Alive: Designing for Urban Childhoods >>](#)
- [Co-designing public space with children: tips for designers >>](#)
- [Play Spaces – Auckland Design Manual >>](#)
- [Sport New Zealand Play >>](#)
- [Understanding Disability Toolkit and Guidelines >>](#) 

Here to help

Your Regional Sports Trust/local community partner are also here to help – please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like to talk through any of this material and/or assistance for your community play ideas.

Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa fund

Funding is available to cover costs (e.g. space / place hire, equipment, caretaker / supervisor reimbursement, transport) associated with providing play opportunities. [Find out more >>](#)

active.org.nz >>

harboursport.co.nz >>

sportwaitakere.co.nz >>

sportauckland.co.nz >>

clmnz.co.nz/counties >> 

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